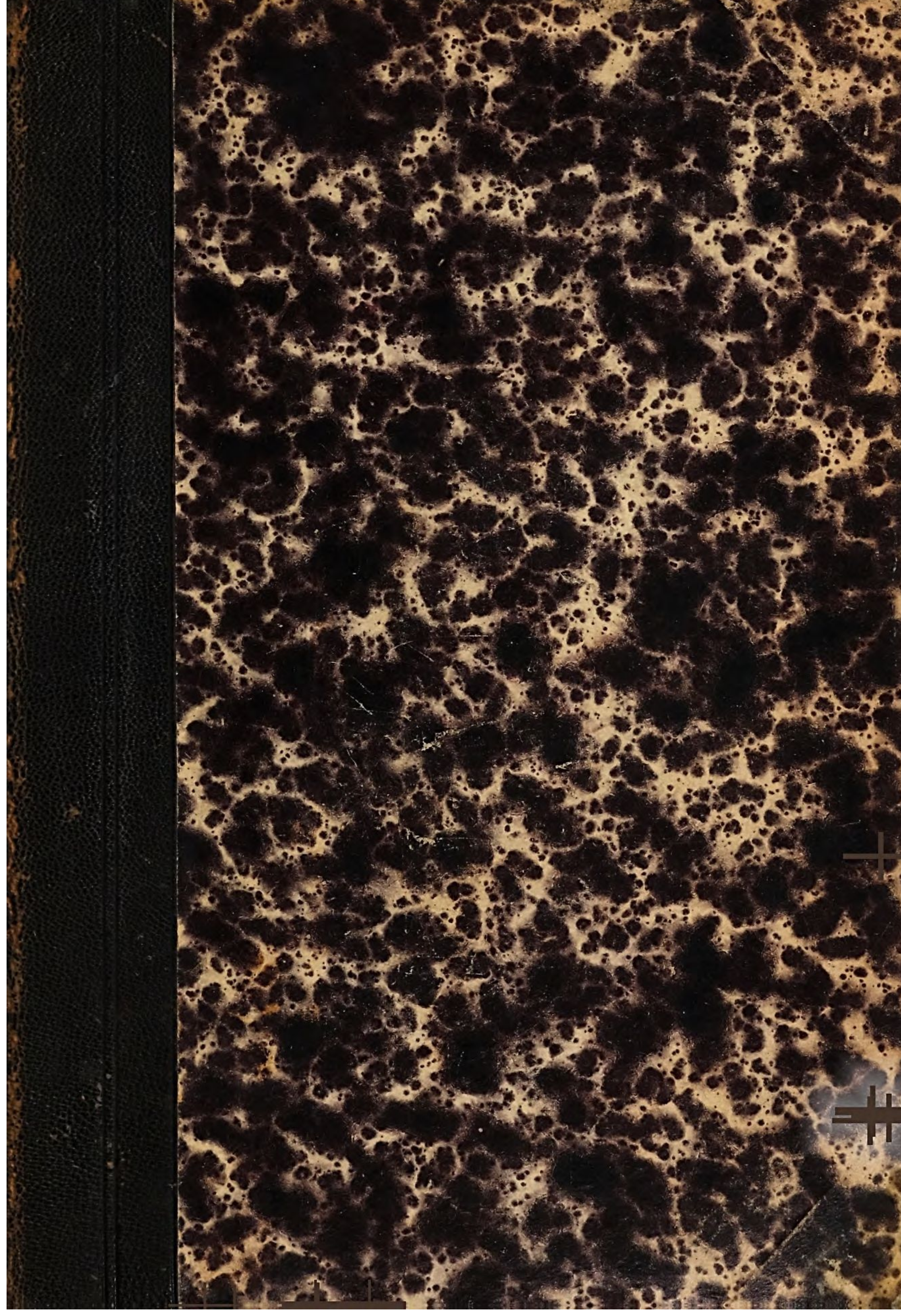




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A
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BY

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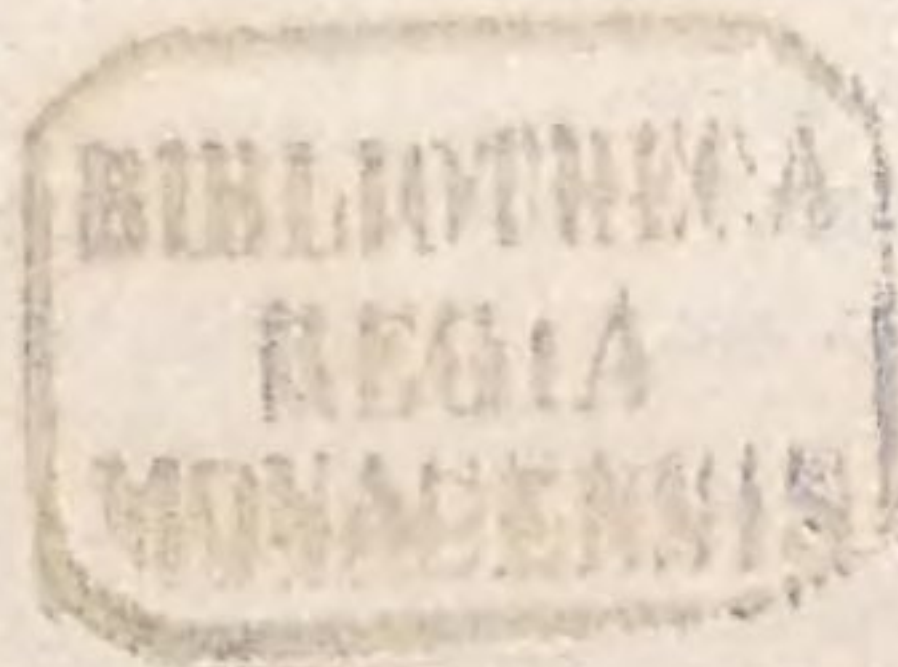
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A WINNING HAZARD.

CHAPTER I.

SOME LETTERS.

It had been a disagreeable day—disagreeable and depressing, with a leaden sky, fierce gusts of wind, driving sudden heavy showers of rain in every direction as the blast boxed the compass and spread seas of mud over road and footway. It was cold, too, with a clammy chilliness that could not be shaken off by exercise, and needing the warmth of a good fire, even more than frost and snow.

So a middle-aged lady evidently thought, as she carefully tended one burning in an old-fashioned grate—old in the sense of forty or fifty years ago, when these receptacles were high over the hearth and admirably contrived for sending the heat up the chimney. The apartment it warmed was a dining-room, and opened with folding doors into another, furnished as a drawing-room. These, with the entrance hall, occupied the ground floor of a semi-

detached house in Paragon Place, Notting Hill, one of the oldest among the many "villas," "crescents," "terraces," and "places" which now adorn that favourite suburb. The lady was tall and thin—even bony, with a long face, a pointed nose, and somewhat pained expression—she had rather faded brown eyes, dark thick eyebrows, and a good deal of iron-grey wiry hair, which was coiled nearly on the top of her head and secured by a large tortoiseshell comb, which added to her height, and was unconcealed by any device of lace or ribbon. Her dress of deep crimson merino was protected by a large black silk apron, and her rather bony hands were clothed with kid mittens—unmistakably old gloves cut down.

She seemed in deep thought as, tongs in hand, she carefully picked nuggets of coal from the scuttle beside her and put them into the glowing hollows of the fire. Then she rose from her knees and put back the scuttle into a corner between a tall book-case and the fireplace, standing still a moment to listen to the rain as it was dashed furiously by the wind against the window.

"He is late to-night," she said, aloud. "I had better shut up." The light was nearly gone; she struck a match and turned on the gas. Then she closed the shutters and drew the dull red moreen curtains, looking round as if to see that all was in order.

There was nothing out of place, the room looked comfortable, for it was clean, well-kept, and bright

with the firelight dancing on the highly polished furniture. It was in a sense well furnished, too, with the solid ugliness peculiar to the earlier half of the present century. The walls were lined with well-filled book-shelves, leaving scarce room for a small sideboard, and certainly none for any ornamental adenda. A heavy bronze clock and two vases adorned the mantelpiece, and two solemn arm-chairs stood right and left of the fire-place.

"The 'buses will be crowded in such weather," she murmured, again turning to the table which was laid for tea, but with a plate, knife and fork, a large spoon, and a small silver cruet at one side. She rearranged some trifling irregularity in the disposition of these articles, and going to a cupboard under the book-shelves, at the other side of the room, she took out a pair of worked cloth slippers and put them to warm in the fender, contemplating them in silence for some minutes.

Suddenly a sharp ring at the door bell startled her. She went swiftly into the hall calling, "Hannah, here's your master."

"I'm coming, ma'am," replied a stout middle-aged woman, opening a door at the end of the passage. Paragon Place had no basements, and in another moment the "master" was putting his dripping umbrella in the stand and wiping his soaked boots on the mat.

"You'll be very wet, Samuel," said his sister (the lady just described), as she stood in the doorway of the dining-room.

"Yes, I am somewhat wet. I was long in finding a place, the 'buses were crowded, and the rain drives," he returned, in a dry voice—so dry that humane persons always wished to lubricate his throat; indeed, he himself sought to relieve it by frequent "hems."

"Let Hannah take your boots off, and I will bring your slippers," pursued his sister. "You need not go to your room to-night. Hannah can fetch your coat."

"No, thank you; I prefer going upstairs."

Mr. Samuel Wincks was a very punctilious personage, and could not partake of his evening repast without performing a toilette, which consisted in taking off his best daylight suit, and putting on an old one. The transformation did not occupy much time, and the "master" soon reappeared.

He was nearly a head shorter than his sister, and even thinner, with a curiously dried-up look, as if many such drenching nights would not suffice to irrigate and soften his desiccated surface. His black hair was thin and ragged on his temples, his keen intelligent dark eyes gleamed under bushy eyebrows; while a wide thin-lipped mouth and large strong jaw redeemed his face from insignificance. He walked to the fire, and held his hands to the flame, rather small, brown, lean hands.

"Yes, it has been a wild day," he said, as if continuing the same strain of thought, "and a busy one. I expected Bouchier early, and he never came, so I had to do his business as well as my own."

The speaker was the second partner in the firm of Bouchier and Wincks, old-established solicitors, of which Wincks was practically the head, as Bouchier was rather a swell, having inherited the business from a hard-working father, and preferred playing at being country gentleman, in his pretty place, near Potter's Bar, to sitting at his desk in the Moorgate Street office.

"He gives you a heap of trouble," observed Miss Wincks.

"All goes in the day's work," returned her brother, resignedly, taking his place at table, as Hannah reappeared with a tray, and put a hot-water plate before him; lifting the bright cover, she displayed a tempting chop, with its accompanying tomato sauce.

"Ah," said Mr. Wincks, inspecting it. "That loaf," nodding towards a nice brown crusty one; "it's not new, is it?"

"Yesterday's baking," said his sister, reassuringly, and they began their frugal repast, which on the lady's side consisted chiefly of a boiled egg.

Beyond the little civilities of the table, few words were exchanged, and when the servant had cleared away, Mr. Wincks rose very deliberately, brushed the crumbs from his waistcoat, drew forward one of the arm-chairs, to which a movable reading-desk, furnished with a socket that held a wax candle, was affixed, and settled himself therein, with an air of habitual and permanent occupation.

Having lit the candle, and adjusted the desk, he

paused as if in deep thought, then he drew from his breast-pocket a note-book, and a somewhat thick letter. He returned the former to its receptacle, and slowly drew from the envelope three enclosures.

Meantime his sister had locked up the sugar basin and cruet in the sideboard, and taking a work-basket which stood on a small table beside the other arm-chair, sat down under the gaselier, and began stitching a short strip of linen with exquisite neatness.

The usual evening at Paragon Place was inaugurated. For many a long year the brother and sister had passed their after-dinner hours in this way, with unvarying sameness. He refreshed himself after the day's toil by forgetting everything around him in some tough and solid book. She found occupation and diversion in working for him.

For these hours of comparative recreation she reserved the lighter and more ornamental kinds of needle-work, stitching cuffs and collars, marking articles of underclothing in fine red cross stitch, or working slippers, and knitting warm woollen waistcoats, which she considered it her sacred duty to provide by the labour of her hands, instead of buying them at less cost both of time and money. There was silence for a few minutes, during which Miss Wincks looked at her brother with a faint sense of surprise. He rarely or ever brought home letters from the office, and never spoke about business. Now his attention was evidently absorbed, and there was an unusual expression on his short, keen, quiet

face. It was softer, and had an amused look withal—a slight twinkle gleamed in his small sharp eyes.

“Don’t you want your book?” she asked.

“Eh—what? Yes! please give it to me, Bess.”

She rose and took it from a shelf which was placed conveniently beside the fireplace. It was a large, thick volume, and, at the date of this story, a new work, being the first volume of Buckle’s “History of Civilisation.”

“Thank you!” he returned, taking it, and placing it unopened on his desk, while he continued to muse over his letters. Three were enclosed in the envelope, two were written in a strong, business-like hand, numbered one and two, and endorsed, “Read these first.” No 1 ran thus:

“Dear Miss Carey,—It will give me great pleasure to introduce your father to my solicitors, Messrs. Bouchier, Wincks and Co. Their business is chiefly preparing railway bills for Parliament. It is probable they will have the management of a new scheme for a line in Ireland, and Mr. Carey’s knowledge and experience of that country might be of use to the firm. Pray let me know where to find you when you move to town.—Believe me, yours very truly,
“G. BRETT.”

This was dated Llanogwen, January 30.

No. 2 was dated “Albion Hotel, Liverpool, February 15,” and written in the same hand:—

“Dear Miss Carey,—Thank you very much for letting me know your whereabouts. I shall be in town early the week after next. When I have seen you, and ascertained your views, I propose introducing Mr. Carey personally to Mr. Wincks, who is my special agent—a good man in every sense. Looking forward to seeing you soon.

“I am, yours very truly,

“G. BRETT.”

The third was in a lady's hand, a little large but refined and clear; it bore the date of the previous day, and the address was “Oakley Villas, Notting Hill”:—

“Dear Sir,—The enclosed will explain my object in writing to you, a liberty which I trust you will excuse. Soon after I received the second letter, Mr. Brett was called out of town, and will not, I think, return soon. Meantime, my dear father is terribly depressed, and is sorely in need of work. Can you not give him any, and may he not call upon you? He has met with sad losses; perhaps the worst is partial loss of hearing. It is right to let you know this. Of course, it does not prevent his being as clever and full of knowledge as ever. I do hope you will be so kind as to consider my application favourably. Now, Mr. Wincks, on your honour, not a word of this to anyone.

“Yours faithfully,

“KATHERINE CAREY.”

Samuel Wincks was immensely interested by this application. It was totally unlike any previous experience of his life, which had from his youth up been a sandy desert of application and routine, though by no means an unprofitable one, as the position he had attained to proved. "George Brett" who signed the two letters enclosed, was well known to him. He was a wealthy railway contractor, though by no means of the first rank in that vocation, having risen from a "ganger" to his present status while still in the prime of life. He was a hard-headed, hard-fisted man, and not likely to risk much in recommending another. He was a widower of some years' standing Mr. Wincks knew, and had a couple of grown-up sons; but this suggested no explanation of his unusual interest in an unfortunate man to Samuel Wincks.

One facet of human nature only touched him on his blind, insensible side. The strong physique—the red hair, the florid complexion, the full and often smiling lips of the successful navvy, which could close cruelly enough at times, told the desiccated little lawyer nothing.

"Do you know a place in this neighbourhood called Oakley Villas?" asked Mr. Wincks, as he returned his letters to their envelope, and the envelope to his pocket.

"Oakley Villas," repeated his sister. "Yes. It is higher up, nearer St. Mark's Church; a tumble-down sort of place. Half the houses are unfinished,

and the plaster is falling off the rest. The few that are occupied have lodgings to let. Servants who have saved a bit of money and those sort of people are tempted by low rents, and overlook the disadvantages. Why do you ask? Have you to recover any bad debts there?"

Mr. Wincks shook his head. "No, we don't do that kind of business," he said. "I have had an application from a man who lives there and wants work. It's a fairly respectable locality, I suppose?"

"Yes. It is quite genteel—shabby genteel." And Miss Wincks relapsed into silence. Her brother opened his book, but did not at first give his attention to the page before him. The letter he had just received interested and even amused him. It was extremely unlike those he was in the habit of receiving. No woman of business habits or knowledge of the world would have written such a mixture of entreaty and independence. The curt injunction at the end indicated a sense of complete equality; the writing, the look of the epistle altogether, stamped it as the work of a gentlewoman, though Samuel Wincks had had but small experience of such "kittle-cattle." Then it gave no details. It said nothing of the previous training or experience of this candidate for employment. Of course the inference was that he must be a lawyer, or a lawyer's clerk, and possibly he might be useful as the projected railway business might necessitate some additions to the staff already employed by the firm, but Mr. Wincks wished the writer and her father were not Irish! There

was always something doubtful—something not quite trustworthy about the natives of that “most distressful country.”

At any rate, he should like to see the writer of that letter. He could judge the case more clearly if he saw both father and daughter. Perhaps, after all, Brett had some reason for drawing back from the proposed recommendation. Should he write and ask? No, not after the sort of confidence reposed in him—not after reading that curious command, “on your honour, not a word of this to anyone.” But if the father had any idea of seeking for work he must be able to refer to former employers. “Well, I’ll see him—I’ll see both,” was Wincks’ conclusion, “but I’ll be cautious—very cautious.” Having made up his mind he dismissed the subject, and was soon deep in the fascinating pages of the volume before him.

Silence reigned unbroken—the wind had fallen, and the ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece sounded like a loud and solemn admonition on the stern necessity of employing the fleeting moments well and diligently.

About the same time silence did not reign in another parlour—or drawing-room, as its owner insisted on designating it—at no great distance from Paragon Place. In short, at No. 27, Oakley Villas, the shabby-genteel, unfinished locality described by Miss Wincks.

It was one of those contradictory edifices which might be described in Irish fashion as turning its

"back to the front." That is, the entrance, staircase, and smaller rooms faced the roadway, while the best rooms looked to the rear, over what was intended to be a general and ornamental garden, but was as yet only a wilderness of grass and bushes, with a few lilac and laburnum trees—the remains of a shrubbery which was once attached to a large house now pulled down.

A sitting-room, of fairly good size, occupied the width of the house, and two windows opened on a much-rusted balcony, from which steps led to the wilderness above described.

These were closed, and the shutters unconcealed by the carefully looped-up draperies—muslin at one side and tapestry cloth at the other. The furniture scanty, the carpet worn; but all looked clean, and there was an air of comfort about the apartment, though the means to that end were scanty. The fire was small, but bright; and in a wicker arm-chair beside it a gentleman was sleeping—an elderly gentleman, with regular aquiline features and grey hair—though this was hidden just then under a silk pocket handkerchief which had been placed over it; and his outstretched feet rested on a hassock and were encased in neat shoes. At a table just under the gaselier sat two girls; one was darning a sock, several more lying in a neat pile beside her; the other, and elder, was making entries in a small account book with something of a careworn look on her face. They were in fact the eldest and youngest survivors of several children born to Robert Carey, now for-

getting his troubles for a while under the merciful spell of sleep—the fair darner being little over nineteen, and her sister between seven and eight years her senior. The latter rose quietly and went to a writing-table at the end of the room; she was above middle height with a rather square figure; her face was broad, but pleasant looking, with good dark eyes, and a refined, though rather fretful mouth. Her hair was dull brown, but there was plenty of it, and it was well and carefully arranged. Opening a drawer she took out a large “port-monnaie,” returned to her seat and began to examine the contents.

“What did you spend to-day, Kate?” she asked.

“Only two shillings for those exercises,” returned her sister, looking up; “and, oh, I gave two pennies to a poor little boy; but I think they were my own, Alicia. It’s no matter, though; and I will give you the change.” She felt in her pocket in vain; then she stood up and shook her skirt. “I must have left it upstairs.”

She was taller than her sister, with a rounded pliant figure that sank down easily into low seats, and surprised strangers by rising up into sudden unstudied stateliness; her auburn brown hair was turned loosely back from the forehead, round which it grew in a graceful well-defined curve, and twisted in a not too tidy coil at the back. In reply to Alicia’s complaint:

“You are too thoughtless, really, Kate! Have we so much money that we can throw it about?”

she turned a pair of big dark grey eyes, further darkened by long, nearly black lashes, on the speaker, and smiled, showing a set of small white teeth as her soft red lips parted:

"Yes, I am careless; but, indeed, I do try to think. I'll run up and look for it."

"And give yourself so much trouble," pursued Alicia, but Kate had disappeared, only for a minute or two, as she came swiftly back with a tiny plush purse which she put down beside her sister.

"I left it in the pocket of my dress, and, oh! it got so wet before I could find shelter."

"It would have been better to have spent your two pennies on an omnibus instead of giving them to that beggar. Then you walked both ways." Kate nodded.

"There isn't much harm done. Serge stands the rain."

"You'll soon have to leave that off," returned the elder.

"That" meant the well-worn black alpaca, prettily trimmed with lace and ribbon which had once been Kate's very best.

"Oh, no! I love it! It will bear more 'doing up.'"

"Eh? What were you saying, my jewel?" exclaimed the sleeper, suddenly waking. "I didn't exactly hear," and becoming aware of the handkerchief over his head and ears he snatched it off. "A ha, Katey, you're up to your tricks, trying to keep your old dad asleep while you're talking treason."

"No, papa!" (young ladies did not say "father" or "mother" then). "Alicia thought of it. There is a draught from the windows."

"Thank you, my darling; you take too much care of a worthless old fellow whose day is gone by, faith, and is no use to himself or anyone else, though, mind you, I am not past my work, only what use is it to say so; nobody will give me any," he ended dejectedly.

"It is too soon to say that, dear," returned Kate, raising her voice a little and speaking with deliberate distinctness, "you have only begun to look for something; you must not expect to find it in a week."

"In a week! No, nor in a month of Sundays," said Carey, rising and kicking away the hassock. He was tall and gentlemanlike in bearing, with kindly blue eyes, fine features, and a quantity of fine grey hair. "I've a confounded headache and a pain across the small of my back. I've taken cold"—a loud sneeze—"yes, by George, a bad cold. It's nine o'clock. I'll go to bed. I may forget my troubles for a bit; if this goes on much longer I'll be sleeping a sleep that knows no waking."

"Dearest papa, take a warm drink, it may help you to throw off your cold—some whisky and hot water——"

"Whisky?" he interrupted, indignantly. "There isn't half a bottle left, and I don't know where the next is to come from."

"Very true," said his eldest daughter; "some

black currant jam and boiling water will do just as well."

"Thank you, no—the remedy is worse than the disease," a look of extreme disgust passed over his countenance. "Good night, my darlings, remember if I am released from this battle of life I have always suffered on your account, to see my treasures in a low beggarly den like this."

"Nonsense, daddy, dear! If you will only cheer up we will be quite content," cried Kate.

Alicia brought him his candle, and both kissed him lovingly, as he blessed them solemnly before quitting the room.

"He is awfully low to-night," said Kate, in a low tone, looking after him with moist eyes.

"Yes, he is tired, but a good night's rest—and he generally sleeps well—will set him right. He will be quite another man to-morrow morning." So saying, she returned to her accounts, while Kate took up another sock, and for a few minutes neither spoke.

"How many days are there before the 28th?" asked the accountant, suddenly.

"Twenty," returned her sister.

"Three weeks! I really don't know how we can hold out till the 28th, and Reilly never sends the rent on the day it is due! I am sure I don't think there is anything more we can do without. If it were not for papa we need not have dinner, but that is not to be thought of."

"No, if we had no dinner, Mrs. Salter would be quite unmerciful about the rent."

"I thought I had done so well in arranging to pay only once a month," resumed Alicia, thoughtfully, "and now it seems to make matters worse. It is far harder to pay six pounds than thirty shillings!—and Dick Travers is out of town, or I am sure he would lend papa five pounds for a few weeks. Then I could manage, but as sure as we come down to breakfast on Monday I shall find the bill on my plate."

"Oh, no, Alsie," cried Kate, flushing up. "Anything rather than that! Why Dick is nearly as poor as we are, considering how he is obliged to appear."

"Nonsense! He is ever so much better off"—and Alicia, whose pet name was Alsie, turned out the contents of her purse, and began to count them, making neat but sadly diminutive little piles of gold, silver, and copper.

During this operation, a sharp, startling knock made Kate drop her work. "How late the post is this evening!" she exclaimed, the bright colour fading from her cheek. In another moment, the small servant, with a letter, came in.

"Please'm, the postman says this was refused at Oakley Street, and he wants to know if it's right here."

"Yes," returned Miss Carey, adding, as the girl left the room, "It's from Cousin Dick. How could he make such a mistake."

"What does he say?"

"Not much. He will not be back soon, and he asks if my father has had that introduction to

Mr. Wincks yet," concluded Alicia, with a sigh, handing the note over to her sister.

There was a pause and the elder resumed, "He evidently hoped a good deal from Mr. Brett's introduction: I am sure he would be awfully vexed with you if he knew the truth."

"I don't agree with you!" said Kate, sharply. "He never could expect me to marry a man who is not a gentleman!"

"He is a good honest, clever man, Kate! You would have been lifted over all troubles—and probably the dear father, too."

"How do you know I should not have been tumbled into an abyss of worse worries than ever? I don't believe much in Mr. Brett's affection. If I loved anyone I would not leave him or her in the lurch and go back on my word because I was not loved in return! It was very shabby of him. Why, it was his suggestion of work for dear old Dad that made me so eager to come up here: not that I am sorry we came, I believe we will get on ultimately, but——"

"You seemed to like Mr. Brett well enough when we first met him at Llanogwen?"

"Yes, he rather interested me. I respected him as a strong, honest, capable man. When he first asked me to think of him as a possible partner for life I did try to think of it,—it is so dreadful to be poor—but, after, a strange sort of horror seized me, and that day, here, when he asked for a final answer and talked a heap of nonsense, I would have

jumped into an open grave rather than marry him."

"I don't think there is much difference in men," said Alicia, with a quick sigh. "They are all very selfish; but there they are, and we must make the best of them."

"I'll never make the best of anyone I don't like, Alsie, and if Mr. Brett had been a true-hearted man he never would have said so spitefully as he was going away—'under the circumstances you cannot expect me to carry out my intentions regarding your father!' That did cut me up; however, we'll see," she stopped abruptly.

"Oh! they are all alike," especially when they are in love," returned her sister. "It seems to me that being in love draws out the worst part of every man's nature."

"It ought not to be so," said Kate, and added no more; she knew her sister's experience had been somewhat bitter, and warmly sympathised with her.

"I am very tired," she resumed; "let us go to bed, perhaps to-morrow's post may bring up some luck."

CHAPTER II.

IN THE CITY.

ROBERT, or as he was more generally known to the genial frequenters of the "Four Courts," Bob Carey, had been a solicitor of good standing in Dublin. His family was well known and respected, and for many years he seemed a prosperous man.

After the birth of her youngest child, his wife became increasingly delicate, and when Kate was about nine years old her mother passed away somewhat unexpectedly at the end—to the infinite grief of her husband—and on Alicia, the eldest of the two girls, devolved the control of the house, and the care of her young sister.

Her late mother had been careful and anxious about the education of her children, but after her death little Kate grew up in a very uncultivated and natural condition, while Alicia found that the cares of the household left little room for anything beyond the study of music, for which she had great aptitude and taste. While Mrs. Carey lived and was in health she acted as a wholesome check on her husband's careless extravagance, but after her strength and energy began to fail, he gradually "got his head," first on her account. "How could I let the dear soul go jolting about in one of those hired traps?" he

said, his blue eyes suffused with tender feeling. "It's very little I save by it either," he would continue, with true Irish logic, which always goes to prove that whatever you particularly wish for is the wisest thing to do. So he started a pretty little open carriage, which "the dear wife" could get in and out of easily. This he found so great an economy that he soon added a horse for himself, "just to keep his spirits up, and divert his thoughts by a canter in the country." It "braced him up," he said. Then came a steed for Alicia. "You see one could very nearly keep three beasts for the cost of two," and to ride alone was not cheerful. Besides, if ever a girl deserved a bit of a treat that girl was Alicia. So they rode together in the spring mornings and summer evenings with much enjoyment. Finally a spirited pony was added to the stud, for his "Katey, darlin', who was such a loving child to her dear mother, just to show there was no difference made between the sisters. It's an awful mistake, faith! to show any preference to one child over another," and so they rode gaily on down the broad and easy road that leads to ruin.

What with borrowing money, to be paid back next year if he had any luck at all, and paying compound interest on principal he could not refund, Carey managed to hold out for seven or eight years after his wife's death—then the crash came.

It was by no means a fraudulent bankruptcy—everyone was very nearly paid in full, but uncommonly little was left for the bankrupt and his children. A small property in a western town, belong-

ing to his wife and strictly settled, afforded a trifling income, and poor Carey's first thought was escape to some fabulously cheap place, where his slender resources might stretch to meet expenditure.

The little Welsh seaside village of Llanogwen, where he had spent some happy days with his wife long ago, presented itself to his imagination. Thither he migrated with his daughters, and for a time with "the eternal boyhood of an Irishman's nature," he enjoyed rambling about the mountains and valleys of the lovely country which surrounded them, digging in the little garden of the furnished villa he had rented, and gossiping with Mr. Brett the contractor for the new line of railway which was to connect Llanogwen with the main line to Chester and London, to increase the prosperity of the little bathing place, and double the rents.

This led to the introduction of the prosperous contractor—to "my jewels"—in their cottage home, where roses and woodbine flourished in the soft, moist sea air.

One other joy awaited them at Llanogwen.

Rambling over the hills one September afternoon they encountered some sportsmen with dogs and keepers—and among them they recognised a certain Dick Travers, second and third cousin on their mother's side, who used occasionally so visit Carey in their palmy days, but was, despite his Irish connection, a thorough Englishman.

Having inherited a good fortune, he had followed his bent, which was principally sport, and sought

big game in various quarters of the world. One fine day the bank in which most of his property was invested, came to a smash and swallowed up nearly all that belonged to him. He had not been recklessly extravagant, but certainly spent his money freely, so when left thus stranded, he had to struggle through a very trying time of impecuniosity, during which he had many curious experiences. Help came, however, in a very unexpected manner. A former comrade in sport and adventure, with whom he had been on very friendly terms, had succeeded an elder brother to the title and family estates. He had tried many things, and now decided to take up politics. Meeting Travers one day in the street, he suddenly offered him his private secretaryship.

"You know I write an awful fist," said Lord Balmuir, "and somehow I never could be bothered with books. I don't know if you are much better at them than myself, but you talk as if you were, and that's something. Anyhow, your writing can be read, and we understand each other. I have a notion you could be more useful to me than anyone else. Come to-morrow and try. We'll not quarrel over salary, and that sort of thing." So Travers went, and a couple of years' habit made him quite indispensable to his friendly employer.

He was now on a visit with a neighbouring magnate, being considered an authority on all matters of sport, and a very agreeable addition to any house party.

He managed to spend not a few hours with his

friends at Woodbine Cottage, and had some confidential talk with Carey, also with his daughters. The result of which was a certain degree of restlessness in the former—and occasional disjointed exclamations such as: “Sure it’s not in a hole of this kind I ought to be spending my time when I’m still hale and strong.”

“Faith it would be better to be making money than beating out a sovereign to the size of two, at the back of god-speed in a place like this.”

“By George, I’m worth two men of sixty yet. I ought to be getting a good salary in a first-rate London office instead of staking peas and budding roses to please those girls of mine.” Finally when the landlord mentioned that the place was looking up and he must ask a higher rent, and encouraged by Mr. Brett’s offer of an introduction to the well-known firm of Bouchier, Wincks and Co., Carey scraped up what money he could, gave notice to quit and started in excellent spirits to try his fortune in famous London town.

The morning but one after the conversation detailed in the last chapter, the girls had descended to breakfast before their father made his appearance. He had continued depressed and slightly indisposed all the previous day, and only brightened up when Kate brought him an evening paper with some account of Fenian misdoings which filled him with interest and indignation. The Careys were Protestant, with that intensity, developed by the union of religious rancour with the pride of a once dominant class,

which looked upon justice to their countrymen of a different creed, as disloyalty to Heaven.

"There is a letter for papa!" exclaimed Alicia, taking up a business-looking envelope which lay beside his plate, "and, Kate! it has 'Bouchier and Wincks' on the seal, or round where the seal ought to be. Oh, Katey, Mr. Brett is not so bad, after all."

"His bark is worse than his bite, I suppose," returned Kate, colouring up to her brow. "It may be to say he has nothing the dear old man can do! How I pray there may be some good news in it!" taking the letter and gazing at it, as if her big, bright eyes could read through the folded paper. "I shall tremble to see him open it. Alsie, dear, have you any presentiment of what is inside?"

"No, not the least! Sit down. I must eat my breakfast. I must be at Westbourne Terrace by eleven, and it is quite half or three quarters of an hour's walk."

Alicia had an engagement to inspect the piano practising of a young lady, the pupil of a costly master, which she had obtained, through the interest of the Rector at Llanogwen.

Kate had just put her father's poached egg to keep warm in the fender when he came in, looking brighter than they expected.

"Good morning to you, my darlings! I am ashamed of being such a lazy old beggar, but faith! I didn't get a wink of sleep till four this morning, and when it did come it was such a stranger I was obliged to pay attention to it! What! a letter for me?"

Hand it over. Bouchier and Wincks! by all that's lucky!" and he hastily tore the envelope open. Kate watched his face with eager anxiety, her heart beating vehemently.

"Come! that's not so bad!" cried Carey, after skimming the contents. "If I have a chance of explaining things to this old fellow, I've no doubt he'll like to secure my services." His blue eyes beamed with the brightest anticipation. "Here you are, girls—read it, read it out, while I eat a bit. By George, I scarcely touched food yesterday!"

So, seeing her sister occupied with the teapot, Kate read aloud. "Sir,—I understand through our client, Mr. George Brett, that you are desirous of finding employment in a solicitor's office. I should be glad to have an opportunity of ascertaining if your knowledge and experience would be useful in ours. May I ask you to call on me on Thursday (the day after to-morrow), at 2.30. As I am told your hearing is somewhat impaired it might be well if your daughter accompanied you.—I am, sir, yours faithfully, Samuel Wincks."

"Uncommon civil," ejaculated Carey, putting down his cup. "That Brett is a decent fellow after all. I thought we would never hear more of him, for I suspect, Kate, my jewel, you gave him the cold shoulder; not that I blame you. Still he is the making of a gentleman. Keeping faith like this shows something better than the yellow clay."

"A great deal better," said his eldest daughter, emphatically. "I shall always respect Mr. Brett."

"It's a queer notion to take my daughter to assist at a business interview," continued Carey. "Maybe it's as well he knows I'm deaf, slightly deaf. But which of you girls will come with me? You are the steadiest, Alicia, my pet; the most imposing, I mean."

"I fancy it's her affair from the beginning. Kate ought to go."

"Perhaps so," said Kate, whose cheek had flushed quickly when the question arose as to which of them should accompany their father, while she thought, "Alicia must not go; that nice old lawyer is going to do as I want him, and I don't want Alsie let into the secret—not just yet. She would be vexed if I don't succeed. I want to make friends with Mr. Wincks; perhaps he will find something for me to do. I hate to be a drone in the hive."

"Settle it between you," said Carey complaisantly. "I'm very curious to see what Wincks will offer me. I suspect he will want me to undertake the new Irish branch of the business, for if they begin with one railway they'll be sure to start a second. Now he couldn't expect me to take less than four hundred a year—bedad I would not take anything under it, unless very hard pressed. I'd have been glad to give as much to a capable man myself in the old good times, but then everything is changed nowadays."

"If I were you, dear, I would not refuse thirty shillings a week. It is so hard to make both ends meet," said Alicia.

"Thirty shillings a week! Alsie, my love. There's a want of proper pride about you that I can't account for. Faith, I can't."

"No one would ever offer you such a miserable pittance," exclaimed Kate.

"There's no knowing," returned her father, philosophically; and breakfast was finished by the trio in a very cheerful mood; Carey declaring that he was another man "entirely" from yesterday, proposed escorting Alicia to her destination, as very likely he wouldn't have many more mornings free himself.

When they had departed, when Kate had assisted the servant to clear the table, and the door was closed, she performed a joyous "pas seul" round the room, and then paused in one of the windows. "I am so glad I did it!" she thought, "perhaps I am lucky, but I must not be too sure. I'll try to keep the probability of failure before me—that's being wise, people say. Is it? I do not think so, for you do get some good out of hope. That lawyer must be a kind man or he would not have played into my hands so nicely. I must try and look well. My hat is dreadfully shabby. I will ask Alsie if I may buy a few primroses to trim it with. I'll go and take off the lace now before they drain the teapot—a little brushing with tea will freshen it up. Shall I tell Cousin Dick the whole truth? No! it wouldn't be quite fair to Mr. Brett; and oh! I should not like Dick to know Mr. Brett ever asked me to marry him. I suppose Dick will marry some great lady one day. I wonder if Lord Balmuir has

any sisters? but I must look to my hat; my gloves want mending, too. How dreadful it is to look shabby; it depresses one's spirits and lowers you in your own eyes. I suppose that is a low idea, and one ought to be superior to one's circumstances. But does any creature—any female creature—ever rise above her clothes?"

The next day was dull, with a leaden sky, but that mattered little to Carey, who set forth in quest of fortune with a sunny aspect. He was tall, and carried himself well and uprightly, having more the air of a soldier than a professional man; indeed, his good looks were remarkable, and in spite of his slight deafness, he had an alert, wide-awake expression.

"Ready! my jewel?" he exclaimed as Kate came into the sitting-room looking her best in her pretty renovated hat, with a bright colour and a sparkle in her eyes.

She had been a little anxious to the last lest Alicia might change her mind and elect to accompany their father—for Kate was determined to maintain her intention of sharing the interview with Wincks, yet dreaded to offend her sister, who could be somewhat sullen at times.

"Why, you are looking as fresh as a four-year-old! I wonder if Wincks has any girls of his own? Faith! I'll back mine against any man's!"

They started in good time, intending to walk until they came within reach of a threepenny fare to the City.

"Nothing like being punctual with an English man of business," said Carey, as they stepped briskly side by side. "They are slaves to time and punctuality. I remember, long ago, when I used to come over now and again to London and call on 'Clerk and Pearson,' our London correspondents. Old Clerk, who was rather a cantankerous customer, used to say with a grin, 'I find you are generally about five minutes late for every appointment, Mr. Carey. Perhaps that is a national tendency, and may account for some of your national misfortunes!' So I just said with a laugh, 'You see we are a quick people, my dear sir; we can generally afford to give that much odds to the rest of the world.'"

"Yet our country people don't seem to me to win the race," said Kate, thoughtfully. "I like success, papa."

"To be sure you do; so does every one, but don't you fancy it's only the good fellows that win."

"I am sure they do not, dear, or you would be a millionaire!" pressing his arm. "But are these correspondents of yours still in existence?"

"To be sure they are! That sort of chap or chaps flourish like a green bay tree, till all's blue."

"Why did you not ask them to give you work?"

"To be sure I did—some months ago—and Old Clerk answered pretty quick that there was no room for me in his place."

On this occasion Mr. Carey was in time, and with his daughter was shown into Mr. Winck's private room with much respect. His distinguished bearing,

his daughter's refined style conveying the idea of important clients rather than broken-down gentry in search of employment.

Mr. Wincks' private office was a gloomy apartment, with an ample view of the very dingy backs of some houses. The bare, well-scrubbed floor had but a small island of carpet, chiefly occupied by a knee-hole table and an oak chair—innocent of cushions and rubbed into a high state of polish by constant use.

Kate had fully expected a tall, dignified, imposing man, with fine manners and a lordly English voice. She was almost amused at the diminutive, parched, keen-eyed man, who gazed piercingly at her as she preceded her father across the worn floor.

Mr. Wincks rose from his chair, leaning the knuckles of one hand on the table. "Good day," he said, in the dry tone that Kate expected from his face. "I shall be free in a moment. Another chair, Evans," to the clerk who had ushered them in. And he turned to a tall, gentlemanlike young man who stood beside the table and appeared to be taking down instructions in shorthand. He too glanced quickly at the unwonted lady visitor and then went on diligently with his hieroglyphics. Another couple of minutes and he was dismissed. Then Mr. Wincks took up Carey's card, hummed loudly, and said, "Oh, Mr. Carey! You are seeking employment, I understand," and so began a sort of cross-examination, not at all uncivil, but extremely to

the point. His quiet business-like manner seemed contagious, for his impressionable visitor answered in the same spirit and with so much earnest attention that it was but seldom his daughter had to repeat any query to him. To Kate it was an anxious ordeal; her eyes grew moist, her colour went and came, and she felt deep in her heart the contrast between her father's past and present position.

"I think," said Mr. Wincks at last, "you may possibly be of use to us in our present undertaking, but I cannot offer you much of a salary—at least until we see how matters work. If you care to accept one pound ten a week I should be happy to give it. I presume you have some reference in London?"

"My former correspondents, Messrs. Clerk and Pearson, will, I have no doubt, answer for me," returned Carey with a sigh.

"Clerk and Pearson of Old Jewry," said Wincks, making a note. "Very good! Suppose then you begin on Monday. The week is nearly over now. Our hours are nine to five, but we are often later."

"I understand that," returned Carey, evidently somewhat downcast by the amount of pay offered, but too anxious to be up and doing to refuse.

"I presume," continued Wincks, turning his glance on Kate with a curious sense of never having encountered anything quite like her before—her speaking lustrous grey eyes told him that she was brimming over with gratitude.

"I presume," he repeated, having paused to con-

template the sweet, sunny face opposite to him, "that this young lady, your daughter, would like to find some paying occupation also?"

"It is my dearest wish!" cried Kate, clasping her hands. "But I do not know what I could do. I am frightfully ignorant, and the few things I do I don't do well." She spoke in rather a low tone to avoid her father's interruptions, as she knew he would boast her many perfections.

"That's bad," said Wincks, with a slight frown. "Has your education been neglected?"

"No, not exactly. You see I was idle and would not learn," returned Kate, anxious to avert any shadow of blame from her beloved father.

"Most young ladies seem to have no idea of earning money in any way but by teaching," resumed Wincks.

"I am sure I could not teach, and—and—I don't like it."

"Ahem! Can you write pretty easily? I am afraid your hand would not do for copying, or——"

"Oh! let me try!" exclaimed Kate eagerly. "If you would give me something to copy I might learn the sort of writing you want."

"Are you willing to learn?" asked Wincks, severely.

"Try me!" she returned, her imploring eyes shining through the moisture that would come into them. If she could only help, and not live upon her father and sister!

"I'll think about it," said Wincks cautiously. Then

turning to Carey and rising—"On Monday then, at nine," he continued in a louder voice, "my managing clerk will explain what your work will be. Good morning!" He stepped from behind his table and bent his head in token of dismissal. Mr. Carey took up his hat, repeated "at nine on Monday, then," in a cheerful tone, made a polite bow, and turned to leave the room. But Kate could not content herself with such a formal parting. She drew near quickly, and startled the little lawyer, who was the embodiment of routine, and could hardly even imagine what impulse meant, by taking his hard, dry cold hand in both her own soft warm ones, and looking at him with grateful eyes, eyes that conveyed even to him the sense of a caress, pressed it tenderly, murmuring, "Thank you! oh, thank you! you are good!"

Then she followed her father before Wincks could collect his scattered faculties. He was quite overcome. The young woman was altogether amazing, perhaps a little forward, not well brought up evidently, still there was something vaguely pleasant in that warm hand pressure. There was a suggestion of life in it, that had never before penetrated to his chilled consciousness. Wincks was of too honest a nature himself to suspect others of shamming, and he felt that this very astonishing young person was quite sincere in her emotions and her gratitude.

"I fancy Irish people are not very trustworthy, but I'll try this man Carey, if Clerk and Pearson give a fair account of him!" and the little autocrat of the Moorgate Street office returned to his desk

and penned an epistle to that highly respectable firm, requesting an early interview on a private matter.

Meantime Carey and his daughter walked away back to the Bank; for some little way in silence, and then he broke out:

"There's a sporting offer, faith! It's a come down from four hundred a year, begad! Why, it's little more than an office boy's pay! Well, well, Katey dear, we little thought I'd ever come to this when we used to be enjoying a gallop over the fifteen acres?"

"No, dear. It is cruelly hard for you, but I don't think that funny little man is unkind. When he sees how clever you are he will most likely raise your salary."

"Salary! Faith! that's a big name to give such a trifle of wages as thirty shillings a week."

"Still, I am so glad you did not refuse, papa. It is much better than nothing."

"Well, I am not sure. It just shows how trouble and misery have broken my spirit when I demean myself to it."

"Don't say that, dearest. I am sure it is far truer pride to accept anything one can honestly earn than to fold one's hands and get into debt."

"Ah! my jewel, you have a wise little head of your own. But it's cruelly hard on a man of my years to knock under like this."

"I know it is, but thirty shillings will be very nice every week."

"Aye; for a pauper without a rap in his pocket."

"Don't think about it, dear. Look! do look at that beautiful barrow of flowers. What charming narcissus and daffodils and those heaths."

"So they are first rate. Let us see what the boy asks for them. You would like a couple just to brighten up that barrack of a room, wouldn't you, my darling?"

"No, no; certainly not, papa. Why they will be sixpence apiece at least, and we must not throw away a shilling on mere fancies."

CHAPTER III.

COUSIN DICK.

THE reader may easily picture how heartily these seekers for work were welcomed by Alicia. She joined Kate in assuring their father that the engagement was not to be despised.

Irishwomen are infinitely wiser in their generation than their countrymen; they have also a truer standard of pride, and a greater aptitude for looking ahead.

The persuasion of his "darling girls," the comfort of resting by the fire after his long walk, soothed Carey into a more cheery view of matters; and before the evening meal of high tea was over, he had come to the conclusion that noble structures rise from small beginnings, and "that no one could tell, faith, what he might rise to in the firm. It was a first-rate firm, and one could see that with half an

eye; and coining money, begad!—coining money every day of their lives.”

The days which intervened before Carey's initiation into the practice of the great house were lightened by a brief but civil note from Wincks, who stated that the reference to Messrs. Clerk and Pearson was quite satisfactory; and by the time Monday morning came Carey was full of pleasant anticipations, of how he would infuse new life and spirit into the whole business. “The English,” he said, “were fine, steady fellows—but there was a certain want of ‘go’ about them, which he proposed to supply.” So the little party in Oakley Villas settled into a more hopeful groove.

Carey was much exercised by the abject stupidity which, according to him, ruled in the office; “not a soul ever speaks one word except about business—divil a word! It's work, work, work the live-long day. Now, I say that a bit of laugh and a joke makes things go quicker. There was a heap of business got through in my own office, I know; but there was many a hearty laugh, and many a good saying to be heard there too.”

That he was not dissatisfied his daughters soon perceived, for Wincks began to discover that he could be useful, and had certain knowledge which was valuable, at any rate for the present.

But Kate grew anxious; a fortnight had gone and Wincks had made no sign. Had he forgotten? And if so, how was she to jog his memory? The fact of having a secret with the imperturbable Wincks amused

and delighted her; and still more did she rejoice in having turned the flank of Brett. Should she ever tell anyone? She could not make up her mind. Alicia was a good and a useful sister, but not exactly a sympathetic confidante. Kate had a hundred fancies—a hundred perceptions, joys and annoyances, which Alicia could not comprehend. Moreover, her imagination had been dulled and blunted when—at the outset of her troubles, when Carey's possible ruin was first hinted at—her lover, a gay young cavalry man, who seemed on the point of proposing, forsook her and fled.

Kate had been somewhat slow in maturing mentally, but now that her fine physique had attained its full development, her intellect seemed to unfold and grasp things which formerly did not interest her; she began to live more in her own thoughts, and indulge in castle building to an extent unknown before.

Meanwhile, "Cousin Dick," who was Carey's only intimate friend in London, or we might say England, was still absent. It was almost six months since they had seen him, and his letters were not frequent. They were dated from many places where his duties as secretary took him. Lord Balmuir, his chief, was not a representative peer. He was M. P. for a Scotch Burgh, and his common sense and attention to business were rapidly increasing his Parliamentary importance, and consequently his secretary's work.

The time of Dick's return, as stated in his last

letter, was now over passed, and he had not appeared. Kate looked eagerly for him.

He was the one bright ingredient in her rather monotonous life; she liked to hear him talk of the people and places he had seen, though he was more inclined to listen than to speak. Then his voice, his manner, pleased her taste, and conveyed a sense of his superiority which sometimes charmed and sometimes hurt her, as she felt that in all probability she should never have a chance of entering the enchanted circle in which he lived and moved and had his being.

It was Thursday—the only day in the week on which the young heiress, Miss Golding, needed her musical coach in the afternoon. She gave more time to her piano on that day also, for on Friday she had her lesson from the costly professor. She was a young lady of “neglected education.” Her father having suddenly “struck ile” in the later days of his commercial career, and left her and her handsome fortune to the care of an aunt and uncle, also well to do.

Alicia set forth in better spirits than usual, for the good-humoured heiress had told her on the previous day that her professor had admitted she was improving.

When she was gone Kate sallied forth into the wilderness of a garden, and gathered some crocus and anemones which grew at the further end—the remains of the old pleasure ground—where no one but herself ever ventured. Then she begged a jug

of water from the servant, and proceeded to fill a paltry vase or two and a large saucer with wet moss, into which she stuck a few flowers that made a goodly show. Pleased with her work, she had sent away the jug and the *débris* of the moss and stalks, and was singing in a low tone to herself as she dried her hands and put the flowers in their places, when the servant threw the door open and said, "Here's a gentleman, miss"—and enter Cousin Dick.

For an instant Kate forgot that she was attired in her much worn black alpaca, that her hair was loose and untidy, and that she was still disfigured by a print apron made out of a hideous "remnant," and put on that she might perform a more thorough dusting than could be expected from "Matilda," by which appellation the servant was known to the establishment.

"Dick!" she cried. "I am delighted to see you!"

"Thank you!" said Travers, taking her proffered hand. "The same to you!"

He was a little above middle height, broadly built, but by no means fleshy. He had a well-shaped, well-set-on head, abundantly covered by wavy dark hair, slightly touched with grey.

He had a pleasant, but not especially good-looking face, the expression frank and strong, the features irregular, with bold, keen, brown eyes, and large moustaches, lighter than his hair. He was well dressed—well set up—and had a distinguished air.

"And how is every one?" he continued, letting

her hand go, having looked earnestly at her in a grave critical way from head to foot.

"Every one is remarkably well," returned Kate, meeting his eyes, joyously. "I should have written and told you all our news. Only I thought you would be here any day."

"In point of fact I only reached London last night," he replied, accepting a somewhat unsteady arm-chair to which she pointed.

"Indeed! you are a dear to come so soon," exclaimed Kate, slipping off her apron, which she suddenly remembered, rolling it up and throwing it into a corner. "Don't be ceremonious," said Travers, smiling.

"I am not, Dick, but that is too hideous. I was dusting a little, you see."

"Exactly. You have got into rather remote quarters, Kate. I wish you were a little nearer Charing Cross, and that the place were less delapidated."

"So do I. It will be tiresome for you to come so far, but, Dick, the three rooms are only twenty-eight shillings a week, including kitchen fire, and it's nice and open—and—and—you will not mind coming all this way sometimes? You cheer my dear father, and——"

"And depress his daughter, eh?" asked Travers, laughing as she paused.

"Nonsense! you do me and Alsie a world of good."

"All right. Then I am bound to come. Now

tell me all your news. What have you done with that engineer, contractor, or whatever he was, down at Llanogwen?"

"Oh, Mr. Brett, nothing at all—I mean—some little good. Papa has found employment in a big London office through his introduction—I mean letters."

"Indeed. That's good news. I suppose he is a truer man than I expected. What's the firm?"

"Bouchier, Wincks and Company."

"I have heard their names. Railway people. I am glad you sent Brett to the rightabout, my sweet cos. He wasn't a gentleman."

"How do you know? Why do you jump to conclusions?" cried Kate, blushing.

"Do you think I have gone about the world blindfold for five and thirty years?"

"Come, Dick, you did not begin to study life at one year old?"

"Well, say twenty," he returned with a good-humoured laugh.

"Still the chance is that you see more than exists with those sharp eyes of yours, Dick."

"By no means. They are eyes, not magnifying glasses!"

"You would like tea?"

"Yes; immensely. I haven't had a cup of tea for a month. The great ladies in Berlin are beginning to adopt the afternoon cup which cheers, etc.,—but it isn't drinkable."

"And how did you like Berlin?"

"Not particularly. I was interested, but I should not like to live there. Then the people are so abominably conceited after their triumph over the Saxons and Austrians."

"I will go and ask for the tea things. I do not like to ring unnecessarily, she has so much to do." Kate left the room. Travers rose, walked to the window, and looked out, then turned and inspected the room.

"What tragedies can be made out of £ s. d.!" he said to himself. "This is a bad finale for that good, kindly, illogical soul Carey. And Kate! She is changed—yes, indefinably changed, and grown, like the lilies of the field, for, by Jove, Solomon in all his glory was never arrayed as Nature has decked her. What will be her destiny? It's an awful business for a young, beautiful, impulsive girl, to be wretchedly poor."

Here the object of his thoughts returned, looking as if the whole of a summer day's sunshine had permeated her soul, beamed from her eyes, and played on her lips. She immediately began to move some books and other impedimenta from the table, and took out the sugar from their chiffonier, that indispensable piece of lodging-house furniture at the date of this "true tale."

"Where is Alicia?" asked Travers, placing a chair for his young hostess, as Matilda entered with a somewhat battered tray, and the usual appliances for afternoon tea, including a small brown teapot, its spout very visibly cracked.

"Alicia! Oh, she is out. Thank you, Matilda; be sure the water is boiling."

"That is another piece of luck," she continued, as Matilda left the room to infuse the tea. "She has an engagement to inspect the practising of a stupid rich girl, an hour and a half every day, but she often gets off with only an hour's work, so she stays two hours on Thursday, and I am so sorry she will miss you!"

"I am very sorry to miss her, but now I am in town for some months I hope to see a good deal of you."

"I hope you will, but it is a frightfully long way to come, Dick. We can hardly hope to see you often, especially as you will be busy. Have you a great deal to do?"

"Mine is rather intermittent work, but Lord Balmuir is preparing for a vigorous campaign against sundry abuses, so I shall have rather more to do in future."

"Is Lord Balmuir nice?" asked Kate, covering the teapot, just brought back, with a pretty cosy.

"Yes, he is a very good fellow, and a sensible useful one, but no orator, but so much the better."

"Why do you think so? The power of speaking is a grand gift."

"A statesman is better without it," returned Travers, stirring his tea. "He is too often carried away by the wind of his own words when he has the gift."

"Do you think so? Is there nothing of inspiration in eloquence?"

Travers shook his head. "I prefer quiet deliberate conviction to inspiration—in politics at all events."

There was a short pause, when Travers, speaking as if out of his thoughts, asked, "How old were you, Kate, when I first paid you a visit in Dublin?"

"I am not sure; about ten, I think. You used to tell me stories of your hunting adventures in Cashmere. Then the next time you came you had been in Africa. That was a good long while after. Our Scotch cousin, Tulloch, was with us that year. He had come home from India for his health, and was going out again. Don't you remember how we used to laugh at his accent?"

"Yes; you were still almost a child, Kate. I met your father in London next, and did not see you again until we met on that Welsh hillside, and we had all come to grief in the meantime."

"Ah, yes," returned Kate with a sigh. "But I am quite sure, Dick, you will rise above your ill-fortune one day and be something quite grand."

"Thanks for your prophesy. May it be a true inspiration," returned Travers, laughing.

"Another cup?"

"No more, thank you."

"I have still a little bit of news to tell you," resumed Kate. "I really believe that dear little Mr. Wincks will find something (not some mischief still) for my idle hands to do. He is going to teach me to write; at least he says he will think about it."

"Teach you to write!" exclaimed Travers, in great surprise.

"I mean stiff law writing, that I may copy things. I was at my wits' end to find something to do, so I thought I might manage that, but I am rather disappointed. I have not yet heard from Mr. Wincks."

"What is Mr. Wincks like? Is he young or old?" asked Travers, elevating his eyebrows.

"Oh, old. Any age. He is so dried up he might have been brought out of the Pyramids; with keen black eyes that look through and through you, and such a funny voice. It sounds as if it rasped his throat; yet I like him, and I am sorry for him. He seems to have no life-blood under his parched skin."

"Your description does not sound like a dear little man."

"Never mind. If he finds me something to do, and pays me, I shall love him."

"Mercenary young person!"

"Oh, I cannot bear to feel that I contribute nothing to the State."

"I did not think you would turn out so energetic, Kate."

"Ah, one never knows what necessity may make of you."

Then their talk flowed on easily in various channels. "I must take you and Alicia to some of the theatres," said Travers, after they had discussed many things. "Have you been to any yet?"

"Oh, no, Dick! Why, it would cost a small fortune to pay for places and cabs at this distance!

And—and,” blushing vividly, “you must not trouble about it.”

“I know some managers,” said Travers, smiling, “and if they occasionally give me boxes, I suppose you would not refuse to come?”

“It would be heavenly!” cried Kate. “I love the theatre, and I have not seen a play for ages.”

“You have had a dull time of it, I suspect.”

“We have been too anxious to be what is called dull,” she returned, “but things look brighter.”

Travers did not reply. He was gazing at the fire in a thoughtful fashion.

“I am sorry papa and Alicia are out; I am afraid you could not wait to see them,” she continued, blushing at her consciousness that there was nothing in the way of dinner to which she could venture to invite him.

Travers looked at his watch. “No, I have already overstayed my time,” he said. “I have to call at one or two places in town; and there is a dinner at Lord Balmuir’s to-day—a political affair. But I will come out again as soon as I can.”

“Yes, do. And Dick, Sunday is the best time; we dine in the middle of the day on Sundays. Suppose you come and make your luncheon with us. It would do dear papa a world of good—and Alicia too.”

“And Kate?” said Travers, with a kindly smile.

“And Kate, too—heaps of good,” she returned, her lustrous, sparkling eyes meeting his fully, frankly.

“Then, of course, I shall come,” he exclaimed,

rising. "It is well to be a public benefactor on such easy terms. I am awfully glad Mr. Carey has found something to do. There is nothing so depressing as enforced idleness. I shall watch the development of this new love of yours with deep interest, Kate; I don't think constancy is your pet virtue. Eh?"

"I am not sure," she returned, with a saucy smile. "Ah! yes, I am true to my friends, I hope!"

"What then—is your resuscitated mummy to be nearer and dearer than a friend?"

Kate laughed. "I shall be very fond of him, I assure you, if he shows me how to make some money. I suppose you go to dances as well as to dinners, Dick?"

"Not often—I do not dance."

"What a loss. You don't know how delightful it is to dance. I never was but at one ball—that was just before our troubles—and it was delicious! I had such nice partners. I was quite in love with them all."

"Ah! my sweet cousin, there is safety in a multitude. Now I must say good-bye till Sunday; but if you or your father happen to want me in the meantime, you have my address."

"Yes, Dick, I have it written down! Well, good-bye, and you will be sure to come on Sunday?"

"Without fail," returned Travers, smiling down into the earnest eyes uplifted to his. "Good-bye, my dear cousin!" And he was gone.

Kate put the cups and saucers on the battered tray and rang for Matilda. When she disappeared with it Kate walked to the window, and stood look-

ing out on the bushes and trees which were just beginning to show the first faint flush of green, but Kate did not see them—she was lost in thought. Her hands clasped and dropped before her, gazing far away into the background of the past. The evening was drawing in, and the pale melancholy peculiar to the light of these first lengthening days, before the chills of winter have been quite vanquished by the genial warmth and vitality of spring, seemed to sadden her. The present and the future seemed dark. It was delightful to see Cousin Dick, but she was suddenly struck with the contrast between his position and her own—why she could not tell. He was poor too, comparatively poor—but he stood alone. He was not overweighted, like her dear father and herself. He had lost his money, like themselves, but he had kept his position. He still enjoyed as good society as was to be found in England. Yes, the gulf which had opened between them was widening, and would continue to widen. It was only natural—only inevitable. Dick was as good a fellow as ever lived, kind and true, but it was not likely he would often care to come out to a remote suburban district, to bestow his attention on his impoverished relatives, and she must not allow herself to expect it, nor be unjust to Dick if their intimacy gently and gradually died away.

It would be better so, for she could not endure the idea of his coming to consider her and hers as bores to whom some degree of cousinly observance was due.

Pride had a larger share in Kate Carey's somewhat complex nature than casual acquaintances, who were attracted by the bright caressing manner which was natural to her, ever imagined. After a longer time spent in these thoughts than she was aware—recalling the large comfortable home in which her early youth was spent, the kind familiar faces that surrounded her, the pleasant easy life where no severe lines were insisted on, and faults, loudly upbraided for a moment, were quickly forgiven and forgotten. How different was the world into which she had now dropped! Here stern necessity and reality ruled, and every mistake brought its punishment.

“Why, it is past six! What can have kept Alsie?” said Kate, half aloud. “I must not dream here any longer. If we must give up Cousin Dick and the kind of people he lives with, we must—that will not exhaust all the good things of life. But oh, how nice he is! He is really much better looking than many who are thought handsome men. There is something so pleasant and sensible in his voice and laugh. One could never imagine such a voice saying anything foolish or ignoble. I am sure he will get on and do something yet. There is a good long stretch of life before me too, but I shall never do much. I don't think I have any ambition—only to be a little independent. I am not clever. Thank God, work does not seem so odious to me as it used. At all events, I can make the room look nice and comfortable before Alsie and papa come in. It seems dark

and dreary. I must not let myself be weak or cowardly, nor sentimental either. No one's life is always dark. Life would be impossible if it were."

Mr. Carey was much elated on hearing that Travers had called.

"I must look him up," he said, "for I have an idea—a first-rate idea, faith!—and he might help me with it. Bring me the map of Ireland, Katey, darling, as soon as the table's cleared. I'll show you where they might run a branch line to a little village on the north coast, where there's only a couple or three hours' crossing to Scotland, just about the part where Lord Balmuir's coal-mines lie, and we might establish a great trade to supply all Ireland with Scotch coal, begad! I wonder no one has thought of it before. It would cost a mere trifle to lay down a railway, and, by George, it would make my fortune. I ought to get a big share of the plunder, and I'll not work for nothing, I can tell you. Get the map, me jewel!"

Katey was delighted to obey, and a pleasant hour was passed poring over the map, and listening to their father's description of the country, where he used to go duck-shooting.

"God be with long ago! when I used to be staying with old O'Donnell, of Rath Coolin, the biggest man in all the county. Ah! life was worth living then!" and he branched off into various anecdotes of his adventures in the blessed days of youth. His daughters listened appreciatively, and Kate quite

forgot her gloomy anticipations and reflections of a couple of hours before.

Finally the last post brought Kate a letter which sent her to bed with an invigorating impression that she was on the highroad to fortune.

"Dear Madame,"—"Dear Madame," repeated Kate, "that makes me feel at least a hundred." "Reverting to our conversation on the subject of copying law papers when you called at this office, should you still be in the same mind I shall be happy to give you further information on the subject if you will call on me at my private residence, No. 17, Paragon Terrace, when my sister will be happy to receive you. As your residence is near at hand, this is more convenient and suitable than another visit to the office; also I can give you somewhat more time in the evening. I shall then expect to see you to-morrow or next day about 7. 15 p. m.

I am, dear madam,

"Yours faithfully,

"SAMUEL WINCKS."

"To Miss Carey,

"Oakley Villas,

"Notting Hill."

"I declare that little man is a real darling," cried Kate, her eyes sparkling as she finished reading this epistle aloud. "I began to fear he had forgotten me."

"Not he," said Carey, holding out his hand for

the letter. "It's not every day he sees a girl at all, let alone a girl like my Katey."

"It will be nice for you to do something, dear, and something quietly at home!" exclaimed Alicia, who had a motherly anxiety about her handsome sister. "I'm sure though people talk about 'filthy lucre,' it's delightful to touch the lucre one earns. I am always proud of myself when my pay-day comes round. I only wish I had another pupil or two."

"Ah, they'll come, for you deserve luck; if it's luck to come down to take pay from ignorant money-grabbers," exclaimed Carey. "Get away to your beds, darlin's, I'll put out the gas and see to the fire."

CHAPTER IV.

A GREAT UNDERTAKING.

KATE Carey was exceedingly jubilant during the next day, even a little proud of herself for having turned the flank of her unacceptable admirer. She felt on the high road to earning something splendid—perhaps ten or even fifteen shillings a week, possibly more, as she became a proficient at her new work.

It could not be so difficult to do, as all sorts of stupid boys managed to acquire a legal hand. Why shouldn't she? As the hour of her appointment

drew near, however, her spirits fell to zero. The prospect of encountering Miss Wincks was rather appalling. First, it was amazing to find such a creature existed. It seemed impossible that the Wincks she knew could belong to an ordinary family of brothers and sisters. He looked to her like a separate and original creation, and her fancy conjured up a droll picture of a second Wincks in petticoats only drier and sterner, and less friendly than the first.

This change of mental temperature, however, was carefully concealed, and after going through the form of partaking of the evening meal, Kate put on her hat and a warm red cloak of what used to be called "The Colleen Bawn" shape.

"Hadn't I better go with you, dear?" asked her father, half rising.

"Oh! no; don't disturb yourself. It is quite near—Alicia and I walked round by Paragon Place this morning just to make sure of the way, and can go quite alone."

"Very well; but in three-quarters of an hour I'll come and walk up and down till you come out."

"You might catch cold, papa; come into the house."

"No, thank you! I see enough of little Wincks by daylight, begad! I don't want him by gaslight into the bargain."

"Isn't he nice to you, papa?"

"To be sure he is; as nice as his nature will let

him. And why shouldn't he be? He gets the worth of his money out of me."

Having kissed his brow Kate started with a smiling face, which grew quickly graver as she hurried on to keep her appointment; then checked her pace when she remembered she had plenty of time to spare.

The clock of a neighbouring church was chiming a quarter past seven when she rang the bell at No. 17, Paragon Place, and she congratulated herself on her exceptional punctuality.

The door was soon opened by the respectable stout servant, the only member of the household who seemed to be "of human flesh subsisting."

"Walk in, miss!" she said, without waiting for Kate to speak, "and please to wipe your feet."

Kate complied, and followed the leader along a dimly lighted passage, the gas being turned down to the lowest economy point. She was ushered into the solemn parlour, where the brother and sister sat in silence over their respective occupations: only Mr. Wincks had not retired to his arm-chair. He sat rather uncomfortably at the table, with some folded legal-looking papers, a blotter and an ink-stand before him, also a "Quarterly Review," which he had apparently taken up as light reading to pass away the time while waiting for his visitor.

"Here's the young lady," said the servant, unceremoniously, and Kate, tall and graceful in her red cloak, a soft fresh colour after her walk in the cool night air, giving more than ordinary brilliancy

to her eyes, came in like the embodiment of youth and health.

She seemed very tall and reprehensibly bright to Miss Wincks, who had not yet quite recovered the shock of her brother's announcement that he expected a young person to call upon him about some copying work.

She felt as if her breath had been taken away by this vision, as she stood up, seeing that her brother did so. His word, his wish, was law to his sister, who thought he could do no wrong.

"Good evening," said Mr. Wincks, closing his book and putting it on the shelf behind him. "This is my sister." Miss Wincks bent her iron-grey head sternly.

"Good evening, and thank you so much for allowing me to come." Kate's voice was soft and sweet, but her accent was somewhat strange to the hearers, who, like most English of their class, expected the same brogue and pronunciation from all Irish people be they peasants or peers.

Something in her frank, fearless face and simple courteous manner appealed to Miss Wincks' exceedingly Saxon nature, and her preconceived notion of a designing minx began to fade slowly.

"You had better take off your cloak," she said, as Kate finished shaking hands with Wincks, though she did not offer her own.

"Thank you, I will," and Kate removed and threw it over a chair.

"Sit down, Miss Carey," said Wincks, as usual

averse to lose any time, and placing a chair beside his own. He began to unfold the papers before him. One was apparently a page out of some legal document, in very clear, stiff writing, with one big "This Indenture" at the top and dotted with "where-as" here and there and a large number of conventional abbreviations; the rest was blank ruled and bluish paper.

Kate gazed at the example before her in dismay. How could she ever manage to write like that? But she would not permit her discouragement to appear.

"This," said Mr. Wincks, "is a copy I have had prepared for you, this is the sort of paper that drafts and copies are always written on, and," taking a little screw of paper from his waistcoat pocket, "these are the pens, or nibs, generally used in my office. If you succeed in acquiring this kind of hand—your father can always procure you such paper at any law stationers—when you have attained some similarity to this writing come and show it to me."

"I will try very hard before I give up," said Kate, gazing earnestly at the sheet before her. "It looks so unlike my own hand, I am afraid I shall not succeed very soon; but we'll see."

"Your own writing is firm and well formed for a woman's," returned Wincks. "I rather think you may be able to adopt this style. I must warn you that the pay is not large, and I can give no more than the customary price, though you are not an ordinary scrivener."

"No, indeed!" cried Kate with a sunny smile, "rather an extraordinary one, and your goodness to me is something extraordinary too. I cannot say how grateful I am. I will do my best to imitate this, and as soon as I think I have done pretty well I will show my work to you."

"I shall expect you then this day week," returned Wincks.

Kate rolled up the "example" and the copying paper. Miss Wincks silently rose, found a wrapper, and handed it to her.

Kate considered herself dismissed.

"I will not trespass any longer," she said. "You have made me quite happy."

"Then you are easily pleased," returned Wincks, drily. Like many of his compatriots, he shyed contemptuously anything like exaggeration.

"I mean just for the moment. Of course if I fail I shall be dreadfully unhappy," cried Kate.

"Is it wise to rejoice so soon?"

"Oh, yes, certainly; it is wiser to get what rejoicing one can, and as soon as one can out of whatever you undertake——"

"But the disappointment after is severer, I presume," returned Wincks.

"Perhaps, but then the worry is not so long drawn out. Oh," continued Kate, looking round, "what quantities of books, you can never be dull with all these delightful books."

"Ahem!" began Wincks, "yes, they are a solace. Do you care for reading?"

"I love it," said Kate, and added: "I have hardly had any books since we came to London, except some old volumes of 'Chambers' Journal' our landlady lent me."

"Hem!" repeated Wincks, and his poor throat seemed very dry indeed. "If you really value books I don't mind lending you one occasionally, but you will find nothing light or amusing in my collection."

"I should like very much to read something grave if you would choose it for me," said Kate, blushing with pleasure.

"Indeed! it is a responsibility, and I fear to give you too dry a volume. You have said you were rather ignorant."

"Yes, very," returned Kate, cheerfully.

"Perhaps it would be as well to begin by endeavouring to get some idea of the constitution of your own mind. Suppose you try Abercrombie's work on the intellectual powers?"

"That sounds terrible," said Kate. "I think I know pretty well what my own are, but I know very little of the world outside myself; might I have a volume of history?"

"Certainly; only by studying Abercrombie you would get more to the root of the matter."

"But, dear Mr. Wincks, I want the fruits of the tree of knowledge, not to dig about its roots."

Wincks looked at her in a sort of solemn surprise, then a queer little crooked reluctant smile slightly distended his close shut mouth. "You have given a curious turn to my idea," he said. "Suppose

you try Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire; that's a good foundation to build upon, but it is rather a lengthy work, and ought to be read with care."

"And will you lend me the first volume?" she cried. "I will take great care of it. You see I have plenty of time for reading. I am a good deal alone. My chief work will be the writing, and then Gibbon for a treat."

"I hope you will have resolution to continue it," replied Wincks. "Bess, will you be so good as to take down the first volume?"

"How nicely bound!" said Kate. "I will cover it up as soon as I get home."

"There are many more volumes," observed Miss Wincks, grimly.

"What a huge book!" exclaimed Kate. "But if I read it for two hours every day I shall get through it. I read very quickly."

"I should try and read slowly," said Wincks.

The solid-looking book was delivered to Kate, who put it under her cloak, shook hands warmly with both brother and sister, not choosing to observe that the latter made no attempt to offer her hand, and reiterating her cordial thanks departed, taking away a certain amount of light and warmth with her.

"I am not quite sure that I like that young person, Samuel," said Miss Wincks, thoughtfully.

"Why?"

"She looks honest and straightforward enough, but she is rather forward and self-assured."

"I think she is more sincere and unaffected. I may be mistaken, but she impresses me as being honestly anxious to work and improve herself."

"H'm, perhaps so, though it is quite possible she may ask for these learned books to humour you. She is sharp, very sharp."

"If you mean intelligent, yes, and if her manners seem not quite what you approve, you must remember that she is not English."

"Oh, that is easily seen! Still you may be right, Samuel. I allow she has a very open countenance."

Meanwhile Kate, looking up and down the road, perceived her father. Hastening to him, she gleefully recounted her interview with Wincks and his sister, and gave him the volume to carry.

"Bless my soul, Katey, dear, are you going to lay such a thundering weight upon your bright brains. Faith, it will crush them to bits, and as to the writing, well, if you like to try, I am not the one to gainsay you, but in all my days I never heard of a woman—let alone a slip of a girl like you—trying such cramped penmanship."

"Well, papa. I have read of some girl who did, and at any rate I am going to try."

"And it isn't worth while doing for the miserable pay you'll get."

From her sister Kate received much more sympathy. "Suppose you could make even fifteen shillings a week," she said, "it would help you with your clothes, and we are both very shabby! I must

have a new dress, and that soon, because I go among strangers."

"Would it not be enchanting to pay for one's things with your own personally earned money," cried Kate. "I believe that dear little man is going to be lucky to me! I am sure there is a soft side left to his heart, though the shell is so marvellously dry and chippy. I don't like his sister so much—she doesn't like me. I must make her like me though. You shall come with me the next time I go."

"I don't want to go, Katey!"

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Sunday was eagerly anticipated by father and daughters. Carey himself went out marketing late on Saturday afternoon, on his return from the City, having the usual tendency of Irishmen to undertake some of the household duties usually handed over to the ladies. The weather was more friendly to these Bohemians than fortune, who generally punishes those who slight her favours, and Sunday came to them clothed in all the fresh and fitful loveliness of early spring.

After a brief tearful half-hour in the morning, the day was serene and sunny, and when the girls returned from church they found Travers talking with his host, and the cloth laid in such superior style, that they guessed "papa" had assisted, and they well knew that their landlady was more disposed to oblige "Mr. Carey," whom she considered

"a real gentleman," even when the rent was a fortnight behind, than any other person.

"You are very good to come so early," said Alicia, shaking hands with her cousin. "It is such a long way."

"I walked here," returned Travers, "and found it a very pleasant mode of travelling. My rooms in Mount Street are quite near the park, you know. I feel the want of exercise in London after the amount I have been accustomed to. And what have you girls been about since I saw you, Kate?"

"I have been quite busy. After luncheon I shall show you my work. Mind, you are to tell me the whole unvarnished truth as to what you think of it."

"All right. You know I never make pretty speeches. I would if I could, but they don't come to me."

The sisters had only time to take off their outdoor garments when the dinner was served, and whatever the outside gloom of their circumstances there was sufficient light from within to sparkle in pleasant friendly talk. Travers told some droll stories respecting well-known public characters, and discussed the political outlook with his host, broke a spear with Alicia respecting the disestablishment of the Irish church, which she considered a most iniquitous measure. Then the conversation drifted to his Indian experiences.

"I had gone to Bombay with a splendid scheme of sport among the Himalayas, when my trouble began; of course, I had to drop it, and come home;

not the most cheerful home-coming, as you may imagine."

"No, faith! We are companions in misery, my boy," cried Carey. "Take a glass of wine, Dick, if wine you can call it; it's as thin as our fortunes, begad. Not what we'd name claret in the old country! Hey!"

"Certainly not; but I'll stick to the beer, if you'll allow me. That is very good. By the way, I saw Jamie Tulloch while I was in Bombay. He is getting on like a house on fire; he has been taken into partnership in a rather good firm, and breathes out percentage, commission, and bills of lading. He was very hospitable, however. It is amazing how these Scotchmen get on. They have a particular combination of caution and daring, an instinct for money-making; fine fellows, too; I must say I like them."

"They are as hard as nails," observed Carey, "and too ready to skin a flint to please me."

"How is it," asked Kate, "that such Irish people as we are manage to have an English cousin, and a Scotch one, too?"

"A very simple matter," cried Carey. "Travers' grandfather on the mother's side was great uncle to your blessed mother; and as for Tulloch, my grandfather's sister married an officer in a Highland regiment, and Tulloch is her grandson. He is younger than you, Travers."

"About the same age in years, but a deuced deal older in many other things," said Travers, laughing.

"It seems a confusion of grandfathers and grandmothers to me," cried Kate. "However, I am quite willing to have Dick for a cousin, and Mr. Tulloch, too, if he is as nice as Dick," with a smile, and a little nod.

"Ah, but he is not, by long odds," returned Travers, gravely; "even if he were, pray remember I have the start of him by a good many years. I have the first claim, Cousin Kate."

"Don't be afraid, Dick, no one shall cut you out," said Alicia.

"Suppose we make a drawing-room of the garden and sit there for a little while. There is quite a nice corner left, with an unsteady rustic seat; this is part of what was a country place—when the country existed here. You can smoke your cigar there, Dick; Alicia will show you the place, and I will come as soon as I see the things taken away." The suggestion was adopted.

"Papa says he is afraid there is a touch of east in the air, so he will read the paper you brought, Dick, where he is. I believe the dear likes forty winks after luncheon or dinner, but will never acknowledge it. What were you talking so eagerly about, Alsie, as I came up?"

"A most delightful idea, Kate. Dick is going to take us to the theatre to see Boucicault's play, and we are to dine with him. Won't that be lovely?"

"What! all of us?" cried Kate, her eyes lighting up joyously.

"Yes. I hope to get a box at the Adelphi next

week. I'll let you know. Then you must come in good time and adorn my rooms, honouring them at the same time; and we'll be all very jolly together."

"Of course we shall! You are too delightful, Dick."

"I'm very glad you recognise my value. Hitherto you have been somewhat blind to my many perfections. This is rather a nice bit of garden run wild. One can almost forget we are in a suburb."

"Yes, it is pleasant now; but it was fearfully dreary when first we came. When all the houses are built at the other side, and the place made trim, it will be horrid; but heaven knows where we shall be then," she ended, with a sigh.

"Exactly! Prince Charming may have come and whisked you away to Fairyland!"

"I fear we have ceased to believe in princes or fairylands," said Alicia. "The last two years have been 'eye-openers,' as the Americans say."

"Mr. Wincks will be my Prince Charming," murmured Kate, thoughtfully.

"What is the new work, Kate?" asked Travers presently, after some miscellaneous talk. Whereupon she began at the beginning, and described both her interviews with Wincks, greatly to the amusement of her hearer.

"Copy legal papers, Kate!" he exclaimed. "I am afraid you will never manage that, my sweet cousin."

"Oh, yes, I shall," she returned, with a little

decided nod of the head. "I am determined to acquire a good legal hand."

"You will not make enough to buy you shoe-strings! Don't cramp your pretty hand trying it!"

"Oh, yes, I shall! I mean to become a proficient! Here is papa! I will go in presently, and then, if you follow, I will show you my work. I do not want him to see all the trouble I have taken and the small result of it."

When Travers followed her a few minutes after, he found she had spread out various sheets of paper, all covered with writing, on a table at the end of the room.

"Why, Kate, you have been industrious!"

"These are by no means all I have done. I have torn up a great many. I have made about five copies of this page every day since Mr. Wincks gave it to me! I have kept the first and second, then a few specimens, and there—there is the last. Isn't it an improvement? I wrote it this morning before I went to church."

"This is a most unexpected development, Kate!" said Travers, drawing a chair to the table, and looking carefully over the papers. "I did not expect such energy and perseverance from you. You have made immense progress. How long have you been at work?"

"I began last Thursday morning. No, you thought me a baby. So I was till last year, Cousin Dick. Now I feel quite old and strong, and different—as if I had gone to sleep a mere child—a happy,

unconscious child, and in the night a solemn angel had told me I must work and think, and be a woman."

"A first-rate angel that, Kate," said Travers, lifting his eyes to hers with a tender kindliness of expression that was as balm to her troubled young spirit.

"Yes, Dick. It was not a lovely angel with wings, you know, but a strong angel, with a staff in his hand. However, this," pointing to the papers, "does not look like angelic work, but it is the first my hand has found to do. Then it is such a comfort to stay at home. I should hate to go into other people's houses as poor dear Alsie does. She is very brave and good, Dick."

"You are both trumps—no, diamonds of the first water. I am proud of my kinswomen." He held out his hand, Kate put hers in it, and returned his pressure with frank cordiality.

"Now you have praised me, you must praise my work," she exclaimed. "Just look at my twenty-first 'Whereas,' isn't it lovely? and here, 'This indenture.' It is quite artistic."

"It is amazing. How soon are you to see your fairy god-father again?"

"On Wednesday. I shall do a heap of copies before that. I want to write quickly as well. It will be so delightful to earn a little money. I have thought of learning shorthand, but I must have lessons, and they cost money, and that is a difficulty."

"I don't think they would be worth the trouble or cost," returned Travers, thoughtfully, as he slowly twisted his long moustaches. "This man, Wincks, will surely raise your father's salary, for his experience must be valuable."

"I hope so," returned Kate; "but I imagine my new friend is more just than generous. At any rate I am going to make him very fond of me."

"Poor old boy, his fate is sealed!" cried Travers, laughing.

"And his sister's, too. She is much more formidable, but I must make a conquest of her, too. Oh, Dick, how can people live such a poverty-stricken life as they do? I suppose they are comfortably off, for our landlady says Mr. Wincks subscribes to all the Church charities. Her husband is something or other in the Church—clerk, I think—and yet we are millionaires compared to them. We have each other to save and help, and we are sure of the day after to-morrow. Why, there is air, and sun, and life, and a good true friend like you, Dick, to brighten us up, while poor little Wincks has only his 'mill wheel to turn' till he is dulled and dimmed beyond any sense of enjoyment." She was busy putting her papers together as she spoke.

"My dear Kate, you are positively eloquent."

"Don't laugh at me. I dare say I talk too much, but I like to talk. Let us go back to the garden and settle everything with papa about that delightful party to the play."

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The following Wednesday evening was wet and gloomy, but Kate covered herself up in a waterproof, rolled up her "copies," and started in spite of her father's remonstrances.

"Well, I'll come and look for you in an hour's time and just walk indoors," he called after her. "It is no weather to stay outside."

Kate was a little late this time, so she found Mr. Wincks established in his reading-chair with a thick volume, and his sister busy with some delicate darning of a tablecloth.

"It is a bad evening," said the little man, rising, with something like a smile on his small grim face.

"It is not raining quite so heavily now," returned Kate, "but," addressing Miss Wincks, "I thought it better to leave my cloak in the hall; it is too wet to bring in here."

"That was well thought of," returned the lady of the house.

"And now let me see how you have got on," said Mr. Wincks.

With a beating heart Kate unrolled her parcel and flattened it to the best of her ability.

"I hope it is not a very bad attempt! I have tried hard." She looked imploringly at him, while the soft colour rose in her cheek as she hung upon his words.

"Ahem! This is not so bad," said Mr. Wincks, after some agonising minutes, which seemed an hour of suspense to Kate. "Yes, you must have taken

pains. That's right. Whatever is worth doing at all, is worth doing well."

"How nice and kind you are!" cried Kate, resisting an inclination to take his hand and squeeze it, fearing that the cast-iron sister might disapprove, which she certainly would; indeed, the warm tone of gratitude with which she spoke was slightly offensive to Miss Wincks, as smacking of too much equality between the *protégé* and her benefactor, between employer and employed.

Hearing it, she took one or two unequal stitches, but a dim sort of smile flickered in her brother's eyes as he replied, shortly, "Diligence deserves recognition! I have a short deed by me, my own property, or of course I should not experiment upon it. I shall let you copy it, but if I consider the writing at all defective I shall not pay for it, and I shall require you to copy it again."

"I am quite willing to do it over and over again," said Kate, enthusiastically. "I would not expect pay for indifferent work, and you think I may manage to write like a clerk by and bye?"

"Well, yes. When there's a will there's a way. I will give you a fortnight to copy the document, for you will want more practice before you begin it. Then there are various phrases frequently repeated, which may mislead you and cause error."

"Yes, it is awfully puzzling," returned Kate, "but I take great care, and always stick a pin in the word I have last copied. I was always losing my place, before I thought of that."

"I should think pin-holes would look rather curious and unbecoming in a legal document," said Miss Wincks, solemnly, and much scandalised.

"You would not see them. I always rub a paper knife over them, then you can't see them," cried Kate, radiantly.

"I will fetch the document of which I spoke," said Mr. Wincks, and he left the room.

Silence reigned for a minute or two. Then Kate could hold her tongue no longer. She rose and took a seat near Miss Wincks. "How beautifully you darn," she said. "I can only darn stockings, and that not particularly well. My sister can darn linen and everything else better than I do. But I like knitting. Then while my fingers are at work my thoughts may career in any direction."

"You should always think of what you are doing," said Miss Wincks, sententiously.

"Do you always think of your stitches?" asked Kate, in a tone of wondering curiosity. "You were knitting something the last time I came. It looked very nice. I wished so much to ask about the pattern, but I was afraid you might think it a liberty. But, perhaps," insinuatingly, "you will show it to me one day, if I am a good girl!" and her sweet, smiling eyes seemed to hold Miss Wincks' cold, steady optics.

"If it is of any use to you. I should be happy to teach you one or two of my patterns. Young people ought to be industrious."

"Yes, indeed, Miss Wincks, and then it is miserably dull to be idle."

"I am glad you think so—I am generally pretty free of a Tuesday afternoon," said Miss Wincks, a little ashamed of yielding to the advances of a girl she was determined to distrust, but feeling Kate's attractive personality, "and if you care to come in about half-past four I might give you a few hints."

"Thank you ever so much, I shall come gladly."

Here the entrance of Mr. Wincks interrupted her. He held a paper folded lengthways, and a long envelope, into which he proceeded to put it, and Kate's specimens of her caligraphy.

"There," he said, fastening it, "I trust you will soon acquire facility. It is an unusual occupation for a young woman, but perseverance can conquer many difficulties."

"Then I shall not fail for want of trying! And oh, Mr. Wincks, your sister is as kind as yourself. She says I may come to see her, and she will teach me some new patterns in knitting. Is it not delightful?"

"I trust it may prove so!" returned Wincks.

Here the front door bell rang somewhat loudly.

"Ah, I am sure that is papa!" cried Kate. "I will put on my cloak at once not to keep him." She took the papers from Mr. Wincks. "I hope to make a great improvement before I come again. On Tuesday, about half-past four, dear Miss Wincks, and many thanks for your permission."

She was gone, there was a murmur of voices out-

side, a pleasant laugh, then the front door was closed with some noise, and a silence which might be felt settled down on the brother and sister, while the ticking of the clock made itself heard.

At length Mr. Wincks spoke with his tongue.

"I am pleased, Bess," he said, "that you gave that young person permission to come and see you. You may be of service to her, and she seems to me industrious and deserving."

"Yes, Sam, but does it not strike you that her manners are rather free, a little wanting in respect to persons of our age and your position, considering her father is your subordinate?"

"No, she is not wanting in respect, but these people are gentry and accustomed to the society of their equals. Their father would be a very capable man if he had a few grains of common-sense; as it is, he is perfectly honest, though scarcely trustworthy, because he is flighty, but the daughter—are there many young women like her, Bess? I am no judge."

"I cannot say exactly. I am disposed to believe her earnest and industrious, only for her manner, and I do not quite like that."

Mr. Wincks cleared his throat with a loud "hem," but no words followed. He took up his heavy volume and read till bedtime.

It was a delightful triumph to Kate to be able to tell Cousin Dick of having opened her siege of Miss Wincks with decided success, and she reported the conversation, mimicking the voice and manner of

both brother and sister to the great amusement of her father.

"That's just him!" he exclaimed, when she reproduced Wincks' little peculiarities. "Faith, you'd think it was himself speaking."

"Don't think that I am nasty and ungrateful," said Kate. "Mr. Wincks is a dear good soul to me, and I am going to love him dearly."

"Verily he hath his reward," exclaimed Dick. "Let us drink his health and more power to him, Mr. Carey."

They were all at dinner in Travers' room previous to the visit to the theatre, which for a wonder fulfilled even Kate's brightest anticipations and proved a storehouse of happy recollection through many a month of chequered experience.

So Carey and his girls settled down to their new life, which was by no means all sunshine. It had its bright spots, however, most of them due to Dick Travers, but some to Samuel Wincks, in whose good graces Kate steadily progressed.

CHAPTER V.

FOREWARNED.

SPRING was again breathing fresh life into the lilacs and daffodils, in the overgrown tangle of bushes and long-neglected grass on which Oakley Villas looked, more than a year after the close of the last chapter, a year unbroken by any event, yet marked by many mute changes and developments.

The Careys had managed to meet their engagements and keep the wolf from the door. Indeed, Mr. Carey had had promotion, and an increase of salary which made him radiant for a while. Though his daughters perceived that his position in the office of Bouchier, Wincks and Co. was very uncertain, he never doubted that he was rapidly growing indispensable to that distinguished firm. Still, for the present, he had employment, and it taxed the ingenuity of both his "darlin' girls" to rescue the money he earned from his grasp before it was spent on unnecessary little luxuries, chiefly for them, which they would have much preferred doing without.

Alicia had continued intermittently to preside over the scales and exercises of Miss Golding, and had found two other and very juvenile pupils. Moreover, Kate, calling for her sister one afternoon, made acquaintance with the heiress, who was greatly at-

tracted by the bright youthfulness of her teacher's sister, and offered to set them down, as she was going to drive in their direction. Thus began an acquaintance not ardently desired by the sisters, for in truth, though intending to be kind, Miss Golding's friendliness was somewhat oppressive in its condescension, and the relatives with whom she lived were appallingly conscious of their superiority. Perhaps the greatest advance was made by Kate, in the particular line she had laid down for herself. She had, by infinite tact, and patient honesty, succeeded in gradually reconciling Miss Wincks to her existence and her visits, for the little lord of the small establishment gave her frequent employment, and when legal writing failed found a standing source of occupation by setting her to work on an elaborate catalogue of his books.

Miss Wincks had been almost converted to belief in her brother's *protégé* when about a fortnight before Christmas he took a severe cold, which turned to bronchitis. He was confined to his room for several weeks, and became greatly reduced in strength. Then his eyes became inflamed, and his sister was at her wits' end to keep up his spirits and amuse him, as he was cut off from his beloved books by order of the doctor.

Kate, who had been constant and anxious in her inquiries, hearing of Miss Wincks' difficulties on this score, offered her services to read aloud, an offer at once accepted by the invalid. Hence some trouble arose.

To Miss Wincks the task of reading aloud was terrible, second only to the sufferings of her hearer; yet she resented the success of the experiment she was quite ready to adopt. Her brother would listen for hours with great content to Kate's pleasant though un-English voice, and even found interest and self-forgetfulness in explaining and discussing knotty points of the tough subjects he generally chose. The perseverance she had displayed in toiling through "Gibbon" had raised Kate intellectually in her benefactor's opinion. In truth it was "toiling" at first, but as she grew accustomed to the grand monotony of the well balanced sentences, and her mind grew to grasp the magnitude of the mighty revolution depicted in his pages, "Gibbon" began to interest her more and more, though it took her several months to wade through the ponderous tomes.

Meantime the mind of Elizabeth Wincks was sore troubled, and her spirit waxed hot within her when her precious brother watched each morning eagerly for his youthful reader, and the doctor congratulated his sister on finding the "very thing" suited to help the patient to complete recovery.

Kate quickly perceived that she was out of favour, and met Miss Wincks' querulous impatience with unwearied gentleness and good humour. Indeed, one day she took courage and asked if she had unconsciously offended, but this had by no means a soothing effect, so she took refuge in quiet endurance and unvarying attention to the crotchety woman's wants and wishes.

But, if dry, Wincks was also tough, and in due time he rallied and went to his office one day.

First, however, he consulted his sister. "Mr. Carey's daughter had been kind and helpful," he said. "He would like to make her a little present. Would Bess undertake to manage this, as he might bungle over it and offend her, for it struck him that the young lady was slightly thin-skinned."

"You may manage it yourself, Sam," was the tart response. "I don't see any difficulty about it. Do you think she would come here day after day if she did not expect payment in the end?" Wincks paused before answering, and then speaking slowly, with an air of conviction, said, "Yes, I do. She comes because she is grateful—and because she likes to talk with me—I know she does, or I could not talk so freely with her—she wants no reward."

"Well, well, Sam, there are no fools like old fools!—but—I must say it is a little hard that after all these years you'd rather talk to a chit of a girl, a mere stranger, than to your own flesh and blood."

"Ah, Bess! who is the fool now? Do you think that because I am glad to help a poor young creature I ever forget all you have been to me?" There was an unusual softness in his voice that startled her with the terrible idea that he must be going to die.

"There, don't talk like that! I'll be having you ill again. You have got down again. I'll fetch you some beef-tea and port wine."

So Miss Wincks was partially reconciled to her brother's favourite for the present, though a little care-

fully-concealed flicker of jealousy in her heart always kept her from thoroughly appreciating Kate.

She so far bent herself to circumstances as to ask the objectionable "young person" what she would like, as Mr. Wincks wished to give her something as a remembrance of the help and amusement she had afforded him.

Kate smiled radiantly, and said she did not want anything, but as Mr. Wincks was so kind as to suggest it, she would highly value a book, any book he chose, and wrote his name in. Miss Wincks was surprised—even a little vexed—she had hoped Kate would have chosen a handsome dress—or an ornament—a book was exactly the sort of gift that would please her brother—it was not a greedy choice—in short the cunningest policy could not have dictated more wisely.

When Wincks was told of Kate's selection he simply remarked: "She is a sensible young woman, she shall have her books"—so in due time Kate received a plainly but well-bound copy of Lamb's Essays, with which she was greatly pleased.

The interval between the opening of this true tale and its present stage was not all dull hard work. Tickets for concerts, visits to the theatre, a rare day at the Crystal Palace—which was then considered rather an exhilarating place of amusement—were due to Travers' friendly thought, so long as Parliament was sitting. Then came a long spell of absence, after which they had occasional peeps at him when he returned to town for short visits. True, he wrote from

time to time, and never neglected his impecunious relatives. Still the time seemed very long till Lord Balmuir and his secretary were again settled in town for the session.

It had been a day of soft continuous rain—what agriculturists call “growing rain”—with a murky sky and oppressive atmosphere, a day which Alicia and Kate Carey had devoted to needlework and the renovation of last years’ garments. They had retired to the large top bedroom, which was their own domain, in order to spread out their draperies, undeterred by the necessity of “clearing away” at intervals to make place for meals.

“I am so glad Easter is over,” exclaimed Kate, suddenly breaking the silence, which had lasted unusually long.

“Why?” asked Alicia, who was threading her needle.

“Oh! because Cousin Dick comes back to-morrow, and will not go away again, not for any long time, till the end of the session. Everything seems intolerably dull when he is away! I daresay he will come out here on Saturday—he always comes as soon as he can.”

“Don’t be too sure!” returned Alicia, who rarely took so bright a view of things in general as her sister. She was very self-contained for an Irishwoman, and her painful experience had rankled more permanently than her nearest and dearest dreamed.

“Don’t be too sure, Katey! I often wonder why Dick Travers takes the trouble to come here so often.

There can be little to reward him—when you think of the brilliant society he can have when he chooses.”

“Why shouldn’t he like to come and see us?” asked Kate, opening her eyes. “He enjoys talking to papa, who is always brighter when he is here, and is great friends with you and me!”

“With you—yes. He does not care a straw about me! But I am used to that!” said Alicia, resignedly. “You are always the favourite, and I don’t wonder at it. But, Katey dear, don’t let yourself depend on him for your happiness. It amuses him just now to talk to you and be a sort of providence to us—to you specially. All men are selfish; and some day it may suit his fancy or his interest to drop us; and how will you feel then, Katey?”

“Feel!” cried Kate; “why, if he is changeable, like that, I shouldn’t care a straw. Of course there is no reason why he should trouble about us. But you are not just, Alsie. Cousin Dick is as true as steel!”

“I don’t care whether he is or not!” said Alicia, in a low earnest tone; “all I do care for is, that you should not build too much on his faithfulness. Just now he is taken up with you; but you must remember that he is in quite a different position from ours, and has his way to make; though he starts from a different level from what we have come down to. It is all very well for him to enjoy coming here to be received as if he were the sun condescending to shine upon you; but he will tire of that, and then——”

"You must be out of your mind!" interrupted Kate, with a gay laugh, though the colour mounted to the roots of her hair. "I like Cousin Dick. I am fond of him; but the day he begins to consider it a mere duty to be friendly and sympathetic, I am ready to let him go free. Nor do I think we have any right to quarrel with him if he does change. Not that I believe he will."

"All I ask is that you will not set your heart on him," said the elder sister, earnestly.

"Setting my heart on him! Of course I do not. We have both to win our way. Do you mean I am not to fall in love with Dick? I know better than that. My duty, my love, my loyalty are for the dear father, and for you. Could we, any one of us, desert the others? Why, Dick is in his way poverty-stricken like ourselves. Do you think so meanly of me as to suppose I would burden any man with my responsibilities and myself? You ought to know me better. We are friends, no more. Dick is like a brother, only a little nicer. Some day he will marry a great lady, and I shall rejoice. You are too ready to fancy love and matrimony to be found at every turn of the road. Because you found one dastard among the men you have known, do you think the class so numerous? You insult me, Alicia; I am not a fool;" and Kate's eyes grew dark with angry fire.

"And you are speaking rather cruelly because you are cross," returned the sister, quietly. "I speak as I do, because I know you are not a fool; but you are very nearly eight years younger than I am, and I

only want to spare you possible pain—forewarned is forearmed, Kate.”

“Thank you; I assure you I can take very good care of myself; neither Cousin Dick nor I have any absurd ideas such as you suggest. Is it likely a man who has seen so much of the world, of society, of delightful people, would ever take a fancy to a half-formed, quarter-educated creature like me? I shall improve—I intend to improve—and I don’t think Dick, nice as he is, or any other man, a bit too good for me; but I don’t suppose men like him would take the same view of the subject. No, he likes me as a kinswoman, who has fallen on hard times, and he likes us all, chiefly, I daresay, because he knows he is of use to us.”

Alicia, gazing at her young sister, whose speaking face was lit up and even beautiful in her excitement, said softly—“There is no accounting for a man’s fancies. You may be charming to him, however unlikely it may seem to us, and——”

“You are talking absolute nonsense, Alicia,” interrupted Kate. “I have no right to imagine Cousin Dick anything but a kindly, brotherly friend. I do wish you had never forced such fancies upon me, they will just make me uncomfortable when I meet him next; but, no—I will not let myself feel or show any change. I wish you had not said such disagreeable things.”

She threw down her work, and hastily left the room.

Alicia dropped her sewing, her eyes following her

sister with an expression of mingled pain and anxiety. "Have I made a mistake?" she asked herself.

She had made one of those desperate experiments, those leaps in the dark, into the unexplored depths of another's consciousness, which may possibly lead to unexpected discoveries, or break up barriers, the *débris* of which may choke the passage to any further communication or outlet for ever.

Kate was, in fact, an unknown quantity; not to be touched unguardedly. Alicia was always eager for her sister's confidence, though by no means dexterous in eliciting it; but while she speculated on the wisdom or folly of her present attempt, the door reopened, and Kate entered swiftly. She suddenly knelt by Alicia's side. "I am a cross, disagreeable, cantankerous thing!" she exclaimed. "You always mean to be kind and helpful! I had no business to be angry! Forgive me, and give me a kiss. I know you are fonder of me than I deserve! I will always mind what you say—though you are all wrong this time"—and the sisters exchanged a hearty hug and kiss, Kate instantly starting a lively discussion as to the advisability of lengthening the skirt on which she was then at work by a false hem, with a trimming of gimp to hide the junction of old and new, and the subject in dispute was dropped for ever.

Nevertheless this attempt at warning had brought about a crisis in Kate's heart-history of which she was herself scarcely conscious.

She was half afraid of meeting Dick again, for she dreaded that she might betray some conscious-

ness that he might be more than a pleasant sympathetic friend.

This fear, however, in no way diminished her impatience to see him, and her thoughts were much occupied with the effort to school herself into a proper state of composure and self-possession before the crucial test of her next meeting with her cousin.

That event, however, did not occur so soon as she expected, for a little note to Mr. Carey on the Saturday morning, announced Travers' return to town, but informed his friends that business would prevent him from making his way to Notting Hill till the following Tuesday.

When that afternoon arrived, Kate found it necessary to remain somewhat longer than usual at Paragon Place, as Mr. Wincks had left directions for certain notes to be added to the portion of his catalogue on which she was then engaged, and she did not like to set her face homeward until she had accomplished them.

Travers was installed, and in conversation with Alicia when she entered the sitting-room. As she crossed the threshold and met his expectant eyes a curious sense that he had been watching for her entrance forced itself upon her, and overpowered her for a second, with a mingled feeling of distress and delight. By a strong effort of will, however, she suppressed this disturbance, greeting him with her usual frank cordiality.

"You have been away much longer than you expected, Dick?"

"No. Not much, about a week. Now I suppose we shall be pretty stationary to the bitter end."

"End of what?" asked Alicia.

"Of the season. And how is the dear Wincks, Kate? and his sister? Have you subdued her yet?"

"Mr. Wincks is sweeter than ever! I must show you the book he gave me! but the sister is not quite so easily won as I expected. She sometimes likes me, and sometimes she doesn't. I don't think she quite approves of her brother's regard for me."

"Is this the way you sow dissension in a peaceful family?" exclaimed Travers. "You are a dangerous subject, Kate!" She laughed, and they continued to talk of the little occurrences of the last few months during which they had been separated.

Kate noted how well he remembered every incident which she and her sister had detailed in their occasional letters. Certainly his interest in their quiet lives had not yet begun to flag, and how delightful it was to see him again, and hear his pleasant, well-bred voice. Only she wished, oh, how earnestly, that Alicia had never stirred up embarrassing and uncomfortable doubts and fears, and ridiculous fancies that made her avoid his eyes, as she never dreamed of doing before. She must conquer this absurd uneasiness. She felt ashamed of her own weakness and foolishness, and her mental effort was rewarded, for as the moments flew past, she felt more composed and at ease.

"I have had a most unexpected visitor while I

was out of town," said Travers, after a short pause. "Whose card do you think I found at my rooms?"

"How can we guess? You know hundreds, of whose existence we are totally ignorant."

"Well, you know this man—the card was inscribed Mr. James Tulloch."

"Indeed!" cried Alicia. "I thought he settled in India."

"So did I. I wrote to ask him to dinner, but I have received no reply. Probably he is not in town. It is nearly a fortnight since he called."

"What ages back it seems since he stayed with us in Merrion Square," said Alicia. "I wonder if he remembers us."

"Of course he must! Why, Mr. Carey put him up for a month or six weeks, and lavished no end of courtesies upon him." Alicia sighed.

"It must be ten years ago!" exclaimed Kate. "I was quite a little thing then, but I used to be amused at his funny way of speaking! Was he not big and red?"

"He is decidedly good looking," returned Travers, "and not so very Scotch. I rather fancy he has made money!"

"Then don't bring him here," said Kate, quickly. "I hate rich people—they are all dull and disagreeable."

"I don't think you know many, Kate—not enough to form so decided an opinion respecting them."

"I know Miss Golding and her uncle and aunt, and they are equal to many," said Kate, laughing.

"I am afraid I am inclined to jump at conclusions."

"Yes, you are not too logical," said Travers, looking at his watch. "I must depart or I shall be late for an appointment at six. Have you been out? No! Suppose you escort me across Kensington Gardens?"

"I can only go part of the way, for I have to call on the mother of one of my pupils, who wants to make some new arrangement about the lessons," said Alicia.

"Well, Kate, are you free; you will come?"

"Yes, I am at your service," said Kate, smiling brightly on him, and both girls went away to put on their hats.

When Alicia had left them Kate and Travers walked on for some little way in silence. It was a delicious evening, the fit finish for an ideal spring day, the hedges and shrubs were all covered with the first delicate flush of spring, and the sweet soft fresh air full of the indescribable youthfulness of a resuscitated world.

"What a delicious day," exclaimed Travers, as they paced along under the arching trees beside the broad walk. "What a glorious place London is! I am always delighted to return to it!"

Kate was struck by his air of exhilaration—of contentment—he was evidently glad to come back.

"I am rather surprised that you, an old sportsman, should like to be shut up in town," returned Kate, "did you not feel the restraint of regular work horribly at first?"

"Well, yes; but the work was less regular when I began—besides—I hope I am strong enough now to endure the inevitable."

"I like London, too. At first I could have cried all day and all night; it seemed so dreary and appalling. But after you came it was better."

"We are under mutual obligations then," returned Travers with a smile, "for London has certainly been rather a different place to me since you came up."

"Flatterer!" cried Kate, turning her large soft laughing eyes on him. "Can Notting Hill count against the charms of Mayfair and Belgravia? That is too much to take in, cousin mine!"

"Yes, you do take it in, Kate, you know. I cannot say what I don't think; and at present I prefer Notting Hill to either Mayfair or Belgravia."

"Ah, well, perhaps so at present. Only when Mayfair has its turn you must not hesitate to show your preference frankly."

"What!" exclaimed Travers. "Do you think me fickle?"

"I can only guess at what you are as yet! I have only known you really for about a year."

"True, and I am only beginning to guess at the depths and complexity which lie hidden beneath the fair seeming of your pleasant exterior."

"What a long speech, Dick; and you know I am quite transparent."

"You are nothing of the kind. Seriously, you puzzle me in some directions, but I intend to find

you out. Now, tell me how your father stands with the great firm?"

And Kate readily poured out her hopes and fears. Sometimes her father was joyous and satisfied; sometimes desponding and irritated against the upsetting whipper-snappers who could not hold a candle to himself; but on the whole he had pretty constant employment, and his health was pretty good. Then Travers planned some treats, the prospect of which set Kate's eyes dancing. At last she stopped.

"I have gone far enough, Dick. I must turn back now."

"Yes, you must, and I will go back with you as far as the Bayswater Road."

"No, no; you will be late for your appointment. I will not hear of it."

"Oh, I'll manage the appointment, and you shall put up with me. I'll find a hansom at the other side, and be in Piccadilly up to time."

"Now, Dick, we have all come down to prudence and economy; don't be guilty of such wild extravagance. Let me take care of myself."

"Not a bit of it. I will not submit to your tyranny on this occasion—for once. I'll have my own way, and a few more minutes to make it up with you; don't say me nay, Kate."

And Kate assented.

CHAPTER VI.

JAMES TULLOCH, ESQ.

ANOTHER week had gone by, when Travers found a note from Tulloch among a number of letters and invitations on his breakfast table.

As he conjectured, the successful Scot had gone North to see his people, and wrote to announce his return and intention of remaining in town. Travers replied inviting him to dinner on his first free day—an invitation promptly accepted. They met in the reading-room of Travers' club—where he awaited his guest, and each was pleased to greet the other.

“And how has the world wagged with you since we met—how long ago?” asked the host.

“About four years!” returned Tulloch. “Well, I can't complain. I've stuck pretty close to business, but I haven't worked for nothing. You see old Beecher, the head of our firm, died a year ago. He had no son, and both his daughters married swells, so his money will go out of the concern. Gleg has done pretty well (he is the second partner), and has a son, a sharp lad, in the office, whom he wants to make a partner by and bye. Gleg is a good man, a countryman of my own, so I have just put all my savings into the concern, and I have come back to

establish a branch of the business in London and work it up. I fancy I see my way to extending the business considerably."

Tulloch was considered a fine man—by himself and the majority of his friends. He was tall, and largely, not to say heavily, built. His hair and moustaches were red—rather a golden red, and his complexion a good brick dust colour. His eyes were either light grey or pale hazel—it was not easy to decide which. They could look frank and laughing, but they could also gleam with fierce anger or grow cruelly cold. He was well dressed by a high-class tailor, and carried himself well; still there was a slightly provincial air about him which suggested that London had not been his abiding city. Still Travers observed a certain improvement in him. His manner showed more self-reliance, as if his position was more assured or his pockets better lined. His accent, too, had lost something of its acute Caledonianism.

Travers looked critically at him, while he replied sympathetically, and then they went to dinner.

There was no lack of talk during the repast, for Tulloch was not only communicative about his own affairs, but he inquired with friendly interest into those of Travers.

"I was sorry to hear that you lost so heavily in that smash of Oulton's," he said. "It is never wise to have all your eggs in one basket; but I am glad to see you can keep your head above water still. I heard of you when I was up in Scotland. Lord Balmuir has a fine property up there, and they tell

me you are A1 with his Lordship. What sort of a berth have you?"

"Oh! I am quite as well off as I deserve to be. Lord Balmuir and I were chums in former days. He is a gentleman and a good fellow to boot, and makes things pleasanter than they might be. He is a rising man, too."

"Ah! it's easy to rise when one is born so near the top of the tree."

"I don't know. A fellow may be born to wealth and all that wealth and position bring, but it entirely depends upon oneself whether one is a nobody or not."

"I'd like to get into Parliament myself one of these days," said Tulloch, thoughtfully.

"Vaulting ambition doth o'erreach itself," said Travers, laughing. "But it is not such a very exalted ambition, nor difficult to attain."

"I know that, and I don't see why I shouldn't go in for a seat in Parliament. I'd cut down a few abuses I can tell you, if I succeeded."

"I am sure you are quite energetic enough to be no end of a nuisance," said Travers, laughing.

"Ay! If it were not for the troublesome members the Government would just get bogged up with jobs and corruption."

"Lord Balmuir is a bit of a reformer, too," said Travers, passing the claret. "You know he is a Liberal."

"Calls himself a Liberal, you mean. None of his sort are the real thing."

"He is certainly not so eager to pull down as the men who have lately risen. He believes that there are a few things left to us from the past that are still worth preserving."

"Ah! I suspect you are a rabid Conservative," returned Tulloch, and the talk turned on politics for some minutes.

"What has become of Carey?" asked Tulloch, abruptly, after the next break in their conversation. "I wrote to him as soon as I reached England, thinking I would run over and see them before I settled down to work regularly, but he never replied, which seemed strange—not like Carey."

"I am sorry to say he has come to grief. His wife is dead, you know."

"Yes, I heard that. It must be eleven or twelve years since I went to stay with them in Dublin. It was a pleasant house, and an open one."

"He is in a different position now. He is living here in London, in rather reduced circumstances, with his two daughters."

"The deuce he is," said Tulloch, a look of annoyance and disapprobation contracting his brow for an instant. "Is he very hard up?"

"Not that I know of," returned Travers, cautiously. "They seem to get on comfortably, in a quiet way. I often see them."

"Is Carey doing anything? Likely to come round?"

"He works with a lawyer in the City, but he is not likely to make a fortune. He is at the wrong side of sixty for that."

"Why, I thought he was as safe as the bank. He lived in such style!—carriages, horses, servants, everything. But I suppose he has something comfortable left?"

"I hope so. You'll come and see them?"

"Eh! They are not what you call in distress? because that is painful, and doesn't answer, you know," said Tulloch, his accent growing a shade more Scotch, as it generally did when asking a question anxiously.

"Oh, not at all. You will see nothing to hurt your feelings. But you need not come if you don't like."

"I certainly shall come. I don't forget old times, my boy! Carey was uncommonly kind to me when I was a raw youngster. You'll pilot me, won't you?"

"Of course, with pleasure. When shall we go? I think I am tolerably free on Sunday—at least till seven."

"All right, I'm your man. What are the lassies like? The youngest was quite a little girlie when I saw her last."

"They are both nice and ladylike, but Kate is a little more. She is as pretty—no, as handsome a girl as you would see in a day's march—full of fun, and fresh as a new-blown rose."

Tulloch's face brightened. He was an ardent admirer of beauty, and had seen very little freshness during the years he had been shipping, importing, bookkeeping, and otherwise scraping together the respectable amount of capital he had put into this new development of his business.

"Well, I am free, too. I don't know many yet, but that won't last long when people find out I am a solid man. I'll have lots of invitations and engagements, I'll be bound. Then I'll have lots of work, too. The first couple of years will be a bit uphill. I'm thinking I shall soon look out for a wife. It's a great help to have a comfortable, well-kept home, and a single man is woefully fleeced in lodgings. Hey?"

"Very likely," returned Travers. "Matrimony never had any special attractions for me. When I was well off I preferred a nomadic existence. Now my locks are growing frosted and I cannot afford such a luxury as a wife."

"Hoot toot, man! All you have to do is to look out for a self-supporting one. There must be lots to be found among the set you are in."

"Of course, I might manage matrimony on those lines," said Travers, and soon after they retired to the smoking-room, where the newly returned native was much edified by the number of acquaintances his host possessed among the frequenters of the club, and their look of importance and distinction. Travers might have lost his money, and be incapable of making any, but for all that he was not without social value.

The Sunday following, though grey and dull, was dry, and Tulloch presented himself punctually at Travers' abode. He was much interested by a few hunting trophies which adorned the sitting-room, and "took stock" of the furniture, books, etc.

"You are very snug, very—and it's a good situation. You'll pay a high rent for these rooms?"

"No; I furnished them myself; the owner of the house was my travelling servant for some years, and when I broke up he married and turned courier. His wife keeps the place in capital order, and as you see I am close to Berkeley Square and my chief. Come, we have some distance to go; Mr. Carey lives in a rather remote suburb. We'll pick up a hansom as we go along."

"Are there no omnibuses in that direction?"

"Yes, crowds; but we haven't time for such slow coaches."

"Oh, if it's a question of time I never begrudge a cab fare."

Travers had had an exceptionally busy week, and had not held any communication with Oakley Villas for nearly ten days. But he knew that Carey and his daughters rarely went out on Sundays, unless he induced them to do so. He was aware, too, of a curious and unreasonable feeling of irritation against Tulloch, and a reluctance to introduce him into the Carey dovecot, though he did not like to discourage his visit, as he knew that Carey would have been deeply hurt had it been omitted. "It is no great matter after all," he mused, as they rolled along the Bayswater Road. "I don't fancy they'll take much to each other—they are tolerably antagonistic by nature." He was a little anxious that things should look their best, and so blind Tulloch to the full depth of the Carey downfall.

As it was Sunday, "the gurl" had leave to go out, so the landlady, a severely respectable personage, herself opened the door, and ushered them into the drawing-room, where Alicia was writing, and Kate was reading in a big arm-chair. Travers entered first. Kate started up, and came forward with the warm welcome of eye and lip, which no mere word can ever speak, while she pushed back her bright hair (it had fallen forward as she bent over her book) behind a small pink ear, showing a round white throat, the tint of which suggested a diet of cream and almonds. Alicia also rose with a pleased kindly smile, while the eyes of both rested with some surprise on Tulloch.

"I have brought you a cousin some half-a-dozen times removed though bodily present."

"Who is it, Cousin Dick?" exclaimed Kate, leaving her slender hand in his for another minute, while Tulloch stood, reddening under the gaze of two pairs of eyes. "Ah! I guess," she went on, "it must be Jamie Tulloch! I think I remember him."

"Well, I cannot say I remember you," cried the flattered Scot. "I left you a wee girlie, and I find you—a—a," he hesitated.

"A beautiful goddess," put in Travers.

"No! but what is a good deal better—a beautiful woman, if I may say it."

"Oh, Dick, give me that paper that I may hide my blushes," cried Kate, laughing gaily, and catching the newspaper from Travers, she held it before her face for a second.

"Ah! Miss Carey, I'd have known you among a hundred," said Tulloch, turning to the elder sister. "I am sure I am delighted to see you! How is your father?"

"Remarkably well. He will be very sorry to miss you."

"Yes, indeed!" echoed Kate; "he is out," she added, addressing Travers. "Just fancy his having a note from Mr. Wincks this morning asking him to call though it was the Sabbath, he wished to speak to him particularly."

"Ah, yes! No doubt your father's experience must be of great importance to Mr. Wincks," said Travers, gravely.

"I wish he thought so," remarked Alicia, slightly raising her eye-brows.

"You have been a long time away from your friends," resumed Kate, pointing to a chair and evidently handing Travers over to her sister. "How glad you must be to come back!"

"Yes, it's pleasant, but I am not come home just to idle and amuse myself. I am going to start business in the city."

"It must be delightful to have business to do!" said Kate, smiling on him radiantly, and they continued to talk in a friendly fashion, Tulloch offering many compliments in rather clumsy style. Travers was a little surprised that Kate accepted them so frankly, though he acknowledged that Tulloch had a tone of rough sincerity not unattractive.

Tea was now brought in, but still Carey did not appear.

"What have you been doing with yourselves since I saw you?" asked Travers.

"Nothing remarkable; Kate has had a great deal of copying to do, and Miss Golding came to tea with us last Wednesday, and took us for a drive to Richmond. She is very good-natured."

"Golding?" repeated Tulloch, who caught the name. "Any relation to Golding and Grimes, the big China merchants?"

"I cannot tell you," returned Alicia. "Miss Golding is very rich; she lives with her uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Palmer, in Westbourne Terrace."

"Dreadful stupid common people, who are horribly rich," put in Kate. "The niece is not half so bad: I think she is rather nice by nature, though rather spoiled by her wealth."

"Her father is dead?" asked Tulloch, adding in a reverential tone, "She must be old Golding's daughter, and I fancy her fortune will run a good way into five figures!"

"It must be pleasant to make money," said Kate, pensively, as she handed Tulloch a cup of tea. "I wish I had a shop."

"If you had a shop it is a toss up whether you would make money or lose it."

"I suppose so, and I am afraid I belong to that class who lose it," she returned; then with a little interrogative graceful bend of the head to one side,

and fascinating smile, she asked, "How do you set about making money, Mr. Tulloch?"

"Mr. Tulloch!" he repeated, with an admiring gaze. "Why do you put me off to such a distance, when you call Travers, Dick?"

"Oh! I have known him so well; he seems nearer—more a cousin than you are."

"I can be as good a cousin as he is," cried Tulloch, eagerly.

"If you are as good as he is," said Kate, laughing, though there was infinite kindness in the glance she gave Travers, "you will be very good indeed. So to encourage you in well doing I shall call you—what is your Christian name?"

"I was christened James, but my friends generally call me Jamie!"

"Then Jamie, let me persuade you to take some bread and butter."

"That's right! I never liked my name so much before," he exclaimed.

"Did they teach you to make pretty speeches in India?" she asked. "You evidently studied more there than profit and loss."

"More profit than loss, thank God!" returned Tulloch, piously. "And I can tell you it's very good to hear a young lady speak seriously about money as you have done. Most of them seem to think it's of no consequence."

"Ah! if they only knew what it is to do without it they would take a different view of the matter."

"You're right! that's perfectly true," said Tulloch, with grave conviction.

"My father is staying a long time with Mr. Wincks," observed Alicia, who was presiding over the teapot, and Tulloch, proceeding to make especial inquiries about Mr. Carey's health and strength, Kate addressed herself in a confidential tone to Travers. "I am glad Mr. Wincks has asked papa to go to him privately, for I sometimes fear they will not get on so well together. They are so different, you see, and sometimes papa comes home from the office quite early and dispirited, because there is hardly anything for him to do."

"I would not trouble myself about that," said Travers, shifting his seat to one next the speaker. "I am inclined to believe that Wincks is a brick! How do you progress in your conquest of Miss Wincks?"

"Sometimes I fancy I have almost subdued her, and then I feel I have lost ground. When the brother is at home she is less friendly, it seems to me."

"Poor old soul! I suppose she is afraid of your fascinations!"

"Fascinations!" repeated Kate. "I don't think my dear old man is amenable to the fascinations even of an hour—but he is good to me, and he seems to know that I try to do my best."

"He would be very dull if he did not," said Travers, in a low tone. Kate turned away, catching what Tulloch was saying to her sister.

"No, I don't care for the theatre. It is all child's play and lies."

"You unhappy man," exclaimed Kate. "What a loss! Alicia and I are quite lifted out of present trials and troubles by a good play. What amuses you, novels?"

"No, I never read them. I know they are all invention."

"And music?" said Kate, continuing her queries.

"Yes, I like a good Scotch song or a lively reel."

"And painting, Jamie?"

"Ah! well, yes—it isn't a bad spec. to buy a good picture!"

"That is not the way to look at it," persisted Kate. "Pure amusement is of immense value by itself. I believe it to be a sacred duty to get as much pleasure out of life as possible."

"But not to the neglect of duty," put in Alicia, with a little sigh.

"No, Alsie, of course not; but no one who is good for anything would go and enjoy him or herself with neglected duties behind him or her?"

"Life cannot be all pleasure, even if crosses did not come. One must take time for serious thought," said Alicia.

"One can be happy as well as serious. It isn't easy to forget worries, but I shall always try."

"You are quite right! You are the most sensible girl I ever met!" cried Tulloch.

"There!" said Kate, with a little triumphant nod to Travers; "you see what a profound judge of char-

acter our Cousin Jamie is! I hope you will treat me with more respect in future, Dick!"

"I am of your opinion about enjoying oneself. Now suppose we have a happy day together, Travers. We'll take you down to the Crystal Palace to spend the day and dine. What do you say to going to-morrow? My holidays will soon be over, so I'd like to make hay while I can."

"It would be very nice," said Alicia, smiling.

"Then let us meet at Victoria Station at two."

"Quite delightful!" exclaimed Kate; "only if your holidays last out the week I would rather go on Saturday. Monday it is always so crowded, and the last time we went Cousin Dick took us down in an open carriage. Then papa must come."

Tulloch's face fell.

"We'll settle it between us," said Travers, quickly, "and let you know. I am not sure what day I can go."

"Oh! we shall be pleased with whatever you arrange," exclaimed both girls together.

At last Travers and his *protégé* were in the street, and after walking a few yards in silence, Tulloch broke out, "What a charming girl! I never saw such eyes—such hair—such a figure—she'd do credit to any man's table—and what a smile! Why you didn't say half enough about them, for the eldest is very pleasant and well mannered. But Kate is a fine creature—a sort of girl one longs to kiss, eh, man."

"I don't know," returned Travers, drily. "I am not given to longing for what I can't have."

"My motto is nothing venture, nothing have!" said Tulloch, with a self-satisfied grin. "And she has sense, too, a feeling for the value of money which few young things have."

"Well, take care! Kate is not easy to please; don't lose your heart and think you have a safe game."

"Game! Why, don't you see she is far too wide awake not to know the value of a comfortable home—and a husband to keep her? However, they don't seem very hard up. I suppose old Carey has a trifle to keep them—not much—but still a trifle?"

"I know very little of his affairs—but I suspect that if he has—it is a very trifling trifle."

"Well, I am rather an impulsive sort of fellow, and I confess that with or without a trifle Kate Carey is a tempting article. She seems rather to take to me, too, hey? She was sharp on you for not thinking enough of her sense. I can always manage to get on with women. Hi!" hailing an omnibus with his umbrella, "may as well go that way as we are not in a hurry."

"As I am not in a hurry I shall walk across the Park," said Travers, shortly.

"Good-bye to you for the present; will look you up soon." Tulloch clambered actively to the top of the omnibus while Travers struck across Kensington Gardens.

He walked briskly at first—with a look of some annoyance contracting his brow. Gradually his pace relaxed, and a grave but softer expression stole over

his features. He wondered if any serious attachment would develop from the interview at which he had just assisted. Tulloch was greatly fascinated, and Travers in his varied experience had seen lasting affection spring up from less hopeful beginnings—per contra, he had known even more fervid fancies at first sight burn out into the cold ashes of indifference before many months, nay weeks, had passed.

But Tulloch was evidently a man of substance, and able to indulge his whims. He was not very refined, but a fairly good and honest fellow, with an air of great sincerity. If he proved disinterested and true, would it not be well if Kate were safe under shelter of his protection from the terrible uncertainties of the future? He knew well how penniless Carey was save for his poor earnings and the pittance derived from the remnant of his property; and what a long life stretched out before this fair young creature, gifted as she was with a superb physique! Besides, there was her sister, to whom she was tenderly attached, to be provided for. "Tulloch is, and will be, a successful man. He is bold but cautious. I have noticed that long ago," thought Travers. "He has certain soft corners, too, which men and women too may fancy they can manipulate. But they are mistaken, the softness goes a very short way below the surface. Kate was very gracious to him. I don't quite understand her swallowing all his nonsense so readily. She can be a reckless flirt, I suspect. I remember how she used to play with that contractor man at Llanogwen, though he was an ass not to see

that he hadn't the ghost of a chance with her. Tulloch is more of a gentleman, much more, and her kinsman to boot, still, I don't see her falling in love with him. She is not the sort of girl who falls in love easily; I don't fancy she would take to Tulloch, that is, I don't like the idea. Am I an idiot, too? This won't do. I must not dream of impossibilities. Good God! Why is it that a fellow with a full purse has all the chances of existence, all the jewels in the diadem of life; and what a jewel Kate is! But if she is well provided for, and tenderly protected, it is not much matter about anything else. I suppose I shall have to play sympathetic confidante and gooseberry picker. Anyhow I must see how far my man is in sober earnest. An old shikari like myself ought to be up to the dodges of such a game, though the social jungle is a little more difficult to thread than the real one."

The following morning Travers received a note from his Irish relative:

"DEAR DICK,—I am sorry to have missed you and Tulloch to-day. The girls tell me he has turned out a fine man. Bring him over to dinner on Wednesday, or the first day you can—a leg of mutton at seven and a hearty welcome. Tell him I suppose he can do without finery. You'll be glad to hear I have a grand job with Wincks; particulars when we meet. Shouldn't be surprised if I play my cards well that he takes me on permanently, say as manager. Anyhow, I see the tide is turning. The girls send

their loves. Luck ought to come, if it was only for their sakes.

“Yours always sincerely,
“ROBERT CAREY.”

Travers looked up his list of work and engagements, and finding he could manage to absent himself on the next Thursday evening he paid a visit to Tulloch, whom he caught as he was going out, and who accepted the invitation with readiness and joy.

CHAPTER VII.

AN IMPORTANT MISSION.

TRAVERS was still writing busily when Tulloch arrived on the much anticipated Thursday.

“You are punctual,” exclaimed the former, rising to shake hands with him; then, putting his papers together, he closed and locked the escritoire at which he had been writing.

“I’ll not keep you long; I can dress ‘à la grande vitesse,’ or, as Carey would say, in ‘no time.’”

“Why, you are all right, man.”

“Oh, I must put on evening togs.”

“What, to go dine in a poky lodging; I never dreamt of changing.”

“You are a traveller, and will be held harmless. But the young ladies would put me out of the pale if I went in my dusty morning attire. They would not put up with any want of proper observance.”

Tulloch looked annoyed, and surveyed himself critically in a long glass between the windows.

"I don't look so bad, eh?"

"No; on the contrary, quite fascinating," and Travers, throwing him an evening paper, disappeared into his bedroom.

But Tulloch found reading more attractive in the cards stuck round the frame of the over mantel glass. These impressed him a good deal. "The Honourable Mrs. Hubert Herries requested the pleasure of Mr. Travers' company to dinner on Tuesday, the twentieth." "Sir Everard and Lady Maudesley wished for the same favour on Wednesday, the twenty-first." "The Countess of Llandaff was at home to Mr. Travers on Thursday," so was Lady Adeline Dacre; while the Duchess of Bungay desired his attendance at a confidential sort of a gathering, as it seemed to Tulloch, the words "small and early" being printed in the corner of the card.

"Why, Travers, you are no end of a swell," cried Tulloch; "you seem to go everywhere, to all sorts of grand houses."

"It's easy enough to get invitations in London, as long as you have a decent coat on your back, and don't send round the hat. I get a good deal too many; one can't refuse all, and the greater number only waste one's time. Come along; we have about twenty minutes to reach Notting Hill, but we'll do it."

They were scarcely five minutes behind time, and found that Oakley Villas had put its very best foot foremost.

The cloth was "elegantly" laid, and sweet spring flowers adorned the room and the table. Alicia and Kate arrayed themselves in demi-toilette—the former in a black gauzy garment which became her, and Kate in lilac muslin, trimmed with lilac and black velvet ribbons, which admirably suited her colouring. Travers observed that his companion's eyes sought her the moment he crossed the threshold, and lit up with an expression of unmistakable pleasure and excitement. He also saw that Carey had evidently imbibed a large draught of Hope's elixir; there was an uprearing of the head, a sparkle in his bright blue eye—a curl of fun and good humour about his mobile mouth, which bespoke a degree of mental exultation. Poor Carey! His schemes were generally on the inverted pyramid system, from a pin's point of base, what a spreading superstructure he could raise. Nature is a beneficent compensator. Carey had little of this world's goods, but then fancy and temperament supplied him with true riches.

While these thoughts flashed through Travers' mind the object of them was bestowing the heartiest of welcomes on Tulloch. He had sprung from his chair, his tall slight figure almost as upright as of yore—his fine aquiline face beaming with the light of the child-like heart within.

"Delighted to see you, Tulloch, my boy," he exclaimed. "Faith, I always said you'd fill out. There was room for filling, begad, you were a bag of bones! Here's Alicia, who knew you well, says she would hardly recognise you, and Katey, who was a mere

baby, says she remembers you. That is all fancy." Tulloch replied by complimenting his host on his youthful appearance.

"Well, Dick, I have grand news for you. Our worthy principal, Wincks, is going to send me on a special mission to the old country. What do you think of that? There's a client of his has a fancy to buy an estate in the county Meath, and Wincks wants me to ascertain all particulars and see that everything is fair and straight. He has come to the right man when he came to me! I know every inch of the country—and I will get the real facts of the case for him."

"Isn't it nice?" said Kate, in a low confidential tone.

"First rate!" returned Travers, who was sincerely glad to hear of such a mark of confidence from Carey's employer. "Best news I have had for a long time." Kate gave him a little nod and a smile.

"Ring the bell, Alsie," cried Carey; "here's Tulloch ready to pick the bones of the chair he is sitting on with hunger." The bell was answered by a promising jingle and dinner appeared. There was a piece of creamy white cod and oyster sauce, and the promised leg of mutton, round, plump, juicy, and delicately browned, followed by some pinky stewed rhubarb with cream. The viands were irreproachable, and if the attendance was less perfect there was an honest jollity about the whole thing that was very enlivening. The jumping up for bread, the hunting in improbable corners for the corkscrew, the

indiscriminate opening of beer bottles by the men, the benevolent striving to save "Matilda" unnecessary runs up and down stairs, gave a cheerful picnic tone to the entertainment. Then the joyous hospitality of the host. How he beamed upon his guests from behind the mutton, and dropped unexpected tit-bits and spoonsful of gravy on the plates within reach, and made surprising "long arms" to those that were not, and pressed his guests to drink the beer and the claret, though "it was an insult to good wine calling such a mixture of ink and vinegar by the name of a decent liquid." Is it not all written in the records of pleasant imprudence? It was a treat to dine with Carey. You felt that every morsel you swallowed invigorated your host. Alas! that the unalloyed gold of such a nature is so unfit for general circulation!—that its flexible purity cannot bear the friction with baser and stronger metals.

It was a pleasant meal, and Tulloch seemed carried away by the spirit of his convives. His eyes dwelt on Kate with undisguised admiration—and Travers was half surprised, half annoyed, at the readiness with which she accepted his attention.

At last the girls suggested a stroll in the garden while the cloth was being removed.

By this time Carey had grown very confidential, and as Tulloch and Travers smoked the cigar of peace, detailed his plans for sharing the business of Bouchier and Wincks, and establishing an Irish branch of considerable magnitude—for Parliamentary

business chiefly—but also for private and general matters.

Tulloch listened with profound attention, and then in his turn hinted at his intention of buying a house and furnishing it, and establishing himself permanently in London. He rather liked the idea of Mr. Carey's scheme, and if his kinsman saw his way to making a good thing of it he (Tulloch) would not mind advancing a couple of thousands to forward the business, provided there was no risk.

"Risk, my dear fellow!" cried Carey, his eyes sparkling. "It's as certain as that you are cutting the end of that cigar. It's a splendid opening! Old Wincks is a shrewd fellow, but he has no enterprise—not a scree! It was only the day before yesterday he said to me—"You are a clever man, and a good lawyer, Mr. Carey. How is it that you came down in the world?" "Faith I never could tell," says I, "luck was against me somehow, though I was an enterprising fellow!" "Ah!" says he, "enterprising! just so: I never was enterprising. I suppose if you were a partner in this firm you would make my business spin prettily?" so you see the old fellow has some thoughts of it. I am not given to fancying things, you know, but it looks like it; and if our friend Tulloch here was inclined to advance the capital——"

"It will be time enough to think of that when papa is asked to join the firm," interrupted Alicia, quickly. She had placed herself beside her father on the rather unsteady rustic seat, while Kate leaned

on the back of it and the others stood before them.

"Well, we'll see!" resumed Carey; "things will be moving when I come back from Ireland. I'll be pleased to see the old country again. Why, it's nearly four years since we left—four hard years!"

"Never mind, dear," said Kate, stroking his cheek, "the worst is over now." She moved away as she spoke and ran up the steps to see if the table had been cleared and the room put in order. When she came down again, she found Travers waiting for her, and apparently in deep thought. He turned towards the end of the garden furthest from the seat and Kate mechanically turned with him.

"Has anything annoyed you, Dick?" she asked, looking earnestly at him.

"No! There's nothing the matter; why should you think so?"

"You were rather silent and quiet at dinner, that's all."

"Well, as you and Tulloch were able and willing to do all the talking, I thought I might rest on my oars."

"Why, Dick, I never knew you disagreeable before!" she exclaimed, with a look of surprise.

"Come, Kate, that is too strong an accusation. I must not lose my character, though if I have been disagreeable once during these years, it's not a bad record," returned Travers, recovering his usual pleasant easy tone, and throwing away the end of his cigar.

"Ah! Dick, your record is indeed a good one," she said; "you have been good and patient, and loyal to us, so, if anything ever does worry you, and it would be a comfort to talk about it, I'll listen as long as ever you like."

"Thank you," he said, meeting the sweet soft moist eyes upturned to his with kindly seriousness, "but I don't see the comfort of talking of one's troubles."

"You are right, I suppose. 'To bear is to conquer our fate,' but it is a relief to me to talk of them, at least to my friends—you, for instance. Yet I think I am a little stronger than I used to be."

"You are a tower of strength, Kate; only don't become strong-minded!" There was a pause, and Travers recommenced, in a different tone, "I see you have found a piano."

"Yes, it is a treasure-trove; Mrs. Salter had one in her room, and one day Alicia asked if we might have it and pay something, you know. Mr. Salter was quite pleased; I wish we had thought of it before; so papa had it tuned, and it is not so bad, though it hadn't been touched for ages."

"I remember you used to charm the soul of the rejected Brett with ballads down at Llanogwen."

"He hadn't a soul," said Kate, with calm conviction. "He had an ear and a sort of physical intelligence."

"You young materialist! Do you mean to say that some men have souls and some haven't?"

"I think so," hesitatingly. "I am ignorant and

illogical enough, but Dick, I have a certain sense of the fitness of things; could you fancy Mr. Brett enjoying himself in heaven?"

"Well, hardly. He might get on better in the other place; especially if he could get up a company to raise water, say from the bottomless pit, to extinguish the flames! Then our Scotch friend, Jamie Tulloch, would be rather out of place in the celestial regions. He'd miss his pipe, his bills of lading, and his invoices."

"But Jamie has possibilities. He rather wishes to be generous; he is sympathetic; you see how pleased he was with poor dear papa's project and entered into it," said Kate, thoughtfully.

"My dear girl, it would not be wise to let Tulloch——" began Travers, earnestly.

"No, certainly not, interrupted Kate. "I know what you were going to say. Mr. Tulloch shall never lend papa any money; no one shall if we—Alsie and I—can prevent it. He is so hopeful that he deceives himself, and then unintentionally deceives others; and he is such a dear! I seem to see him in a new light since we came to London. Oh, Dick, he wants to be taken care of."

"Perhaps, rather. When does he start?"

"On Saturday. How strange it will seem to be without him."

"Still it is a great step in advance his being sent on this mission. I must come and look you up, and see that you are conducting yourself properly."

"Pray do. By the bye, we have a new acquaint-

ance. The clergyman of the church we go to has called. Alicia told Mr. Salter, our landlady, that she would like to teach in the Sunday school; and it seems they wanted teachers very much; so Mr. Overton came to see us. Alicia always liked that sort of thing."

"And you?" asked Travers.

"Well, no, I am ashamed to say, I don't know why I feel awkward and uncertain. Now Alsie is quite at home."

Here they had accomplished the tour of the wilderness, and joined the rest.

"Come, Kate, let us have one of the melodies," said Travers. "I was afraid you would forget how to sing."

"I had, nearly," she returned, "but you see, Alicia has kept up her music, and helps me."

The rest of the evening went over quickly, with an occasional song from Kate, and some of Alicia's expressive playing. Kate's voice, though needing culture, was rich, sweet, and true, just what might be expected from her graceful, creamy throat. She was naturally dramatic, and in no way shy.

When she had sung the quaint little Irish ditty, "Kathleen O'More," her father, who had listened with delight, suddenly exclaimed:

"That reminds me of Brett and Llanogwen! Faith, it quite slipped my memory to tell you I met him the day before yesterday, coming out of Wincks' private room, and you'd think he had seen a ghost! 'You here!' he exclaimed, stepping back and staring

at me. 'To be sure I am,' said I. 'Thanks to you! You did me a good turn when you introduced me to this firm. I'll not forget it! Why don't you come up and see us? We are in a pleasant part, though a trifle out of the way.' Then he looked very straight at me, and said he had been making a line in Italy. What do you think of that, and that he was too busy to come and see us, for he was going to be married next week to a widow lady with a lot of money, he gave me to understand. He thinks more than ever of himself, but he desired me to tell the young ladies. This journey to Ireland put it all out of my head."

Travers noticed that Kate's colour came quickly over cheek and brow as her father spoke, and his eyes caught hers with an amused look.

"Can you sing a Scotch song?" asked Tulloch, who seemed to be enjoying himself greatly.

"One or two old ones," said Kate, and asked her sister to play the accompaniment of that almost forgotten ballad, "Donald," to his further delectation. Then there was a stirrup cup in the shape of a modest glass of whisky and water, and good nights were exchanged. It was a quiet, dry night, and the two men walked on together towards town for a short way in silence.

"I fancy you live rather fast, Travers," said Tulloch, with a slight irritated tone.

"I? Far from it. I am as careful a fellow as ever lived. Why, poor old Carey calls me a screw, and I am always preaching prudence to him."

"Well, I'm sure he seems prudent enough; at any

rate his daughter is. What a wife that girl would make!"

"Which?" asked Travers, lighting a cigar.

"Why, Kate, of course. The other is quite different; very nice and all that, but so quiet and sedate. And do you mean to say that Carey has nothing to leave behind him? Come, now, he'll have some; not much, perhaps, but still some tin for the girls?"

"An old coffee pot, probably, and I am not sure of that."

"Well, it's an awful shame. What a reckless scamp Carey must be," cried Tulloch, with some heat. "I don't think I'd have accepted his invitation to dinner if I had known all this."

"You would only have deprived him of a great deal of pleasure and done no good. Have you not seen enough of life to know that it is nearly useless to try and make a man act on different lines from those natural to him, or if you succeed he fails? Men rarely win except off their own bats."

"Don't fancy Carey would ever win off his own bat or any other man's."

"I don't agree with you. He is bright and shrewd in an intermittent way. He is, or was, quite capable of making a hit in sundry directions, but not perhaps in gripping the fruits thereof tight enough. Of course I speak in the past tense."

"When shall we manage that day at the Crystal Palace?" asked Tulloch. "The girls say you took them down in an open carriage and pair, or four,

not sure which. Now I think pleasure ceases to be pleasure when it costs too much."

"So do I," returned Travers, laughing; "but you see I didn't think it did, and we had a very jolly day. When you don't do a thing often you may as well do it thoroughly."

"That's not the way to scrape money together," said Tulloch, sulkily.

"I know that. But as I shall never have a chance of doing so I may as well enjoy what I can. I don't say it's wise. Yours is a good maxim. I dare say if I had a margin to work upon I would scrape and save heartily enough, but as I haven't, why, all I care for is to keep clear of debt."

"Why, you'll die a miserable bachelor, then!" cried Tulloch.

"A bachelor? Yes. A miserable one, certainly not. To be sure there are heiresses, discriminating heiresses, to be found, Jamie my man."

"And that's truth," said Tulloch, heartily.

"Now you, lucky fellow that you are," resumed Travers, "have only to pick up the fairest charmer you can find, and throw considerations of pelf to the wind."

"I'm not so sure about that, Travers. It's uncommon handy to find a wife with a tidy little fortune. I'm not greedy—far from it, but I should like the woman I marry to have something of her own; and, by the way, I am invited to a big dinner at Anderson's—he is the London partner in Berry, Thomas and Anderson's, the great China merchants—on Wednes-

day; and I daresay I'll meet more than one twenty thousand pounder there."

"Go in and win, then; only make your selection—prudence, ambition, and a moneyed wife, or the girl of your heart-love and the world well lost. Don't play fast and loose with both, or take my word, you'll come to grief—decided grief." There was something very serious in Travers' warning tone. Tulloch changed the subject.

"As to our expedition. Miss Carey—Alicia says they would rather wait till their father comes back. I must say he is capital company."

"So be it, then," said Travers, rather impatiently, with an unreasoning sense of irritation against his companion. "I shall not be free for more than a week myself, so it had better be postponed. High! Here hansom! Can't lose any more time; come along, Tulloch, as far as the Marble Arch, where you will find a splendid choice of omnibuses."

It may be imagined with what tender thoughtfulness Carey's daughters mended and packed and sewed on buttons, in preparation for their father's journey. He was to be allowed travelling expenses, but not until his mission was accomplished, an arrangement which caused those young ladies some anxiety.

"I wonder how he will manage it," said Alicia to Kate, the day before he was to start. "He has never said a word about it, and he seems quite happy."

"You know he has a way of looking like that,

when the next day he is obliged to confess he hasn't half a crown in the world. I'll ask him, Alsie, though I hate to do it. It's a sort of liberty to take with one's father; but I'm awfully afraid he might ask Mr. Wincks for an advance. It would lower him dreadfully. Mr. Wincks is very, very good in many ways, and does not think that he despises poverty, but I fancy he cannot imagine a respectable man without a reserve fund of some kind—not less than ten pounds; and in his heart believes that people who haven't ought to be under police surveillance."

"It is very bad indeed to have nothing behind one," remarked Alicia, thoughtfully; "but thank God we are wonderfully well paid up; nor do I feel so much afraid of the future now, so long as we keep well. It would be awful if any of us fell ill."

"Oh, nonsense, Alsie; we never are ill. Why should we begin now?"

"There's papa's ring," said Alicia, starting up; "I will let him in, and then leave you together."

Kate nodded, and laid down her father's gloves, which she had been stitching.

"Hard at work for the old dad, my jewel," was his greeting. "I'll not be myself at all when I haven't you and Alsie beside me; but it will be a real joy to come back again."

"Yes, and the journey will do you so much good; you will have so much to tell us. Now, dear, forgive me, but—how are you off for money? You have not been obliged to ask Mr. Wincks for any?"

"Not I, faith! I'd cut my tongue out first. But

I have a couple of fivers all right, where I can get at them easy; so I'll be all right for my start to-morrow evening; and, of course, I'll put them back when the firm pays up."

"I am so glad to hear it. Mind you hold the money very tight, dear; but don't pinch and worry while you are moving about—go to good inns and eat good dinners. You will not travel first class?"

"Is it me? and we wanting no end of things! No, by George! All the same, Bouchier and Co. shall not demean themselves by paying less than first-class fare!" Kate coloured a little.

"They ought, certainly," she said hesitatingly; "and you would go to first-class places, but if you don't——"

"Do you take your old father for a cheat, my darling? Faith! it isn't complimentary. No, no; but if they choose to give me first-class pay, and I choose to go to second-class places that's my affair; if they ask me what my journey cost, why that's another pair of shoes. Now, where's my Alsie? Come, hurry up tea and whatever you have, I am as hungry as a hunter!"

Kate and her sister were highly pleased and greatly surprised to find their father so flush of cash, and with light hearts continued their work of preparation.

How they packed his valise and cut sandwiches, and filled a little flask with whisky and water, and collected pennies and threepenny bits that he might be saved from feeing the porters too largely, and put

a travelling cap in his pocket that he might sleep comfortably, may be imagined. Then in a fit of intense economy he declined a cab, insisting on proceeding to Euston Square by a succession of omnibuses. So he bade them a loving farewell, and departed gleefully, carrying his own luggage, and quite certain of going to conquer fresh business worlds: like another Alexander.

CHAPTER VIII.

A REVELATION.

It was wonderfully strange to be without the dear father. Alicia and her sister had rarely been separated from him before; a great sense of loneliness oppressed them. Although the girls really took care of him in all essentials, they firmly believed that his protection was of the last importance to them, and out of doors hated to do anything, or go anywhere without him. His letters, however, were cheery and interesting. In Dublin his old friends and acquaintances received him with open arms, and wished to lavish hospitality upon him which he could not stay to receive; but after a short conference with the estate agent in whose hands the property, respecting which he had to make enquiries, had been placed, he hurried away southwest to inspect it.

"It's quite amazing how gossip and invention go hand in hand," was the concluding paragraph of one

of his first epistles. "It is reported here that I am head man in a big London firm which is going to buy up half Ireland; and I might live free of cost for a month of Sundays if I choose. But I must get through my work sharp, and come back to my darlings. Anyhow, it's a small thing that amuses the people here—or indeed anywhere—and I'd be sorry to spoil their sport; let them have their bit of invention to play with. I will write more fully from Ballykill-doolan."

"It will do him so much good," said Alicia, reflectively handing the letter which she had read aloud to Kate.

"I was afraid the sight of the old places would have made him sad," she remarked; "but the welcome he has had will cheer him up, and he'll come back a new man; though I am sure he has wonderful fortitude."

"And resignation," added Alicia.

"I prefer fortitude," returned Kate; "resignation is a woman's virtue, though very little of it has come to my share."

"Here is an invitation from Miss Golding to a children's party to-morrow, which means that I am to help her with the tea, and play for the dancing and musical chairs," said Alicia.

"Ah, well, she has been very nice and good; I wish she had asked me. I would have romped with the children with pleasure. I shall go and see Miss Wincks while you are out. I have finished the last book Mr. Wincks gave me, and an awfully

tough one it is. Now he will want to examine me in it. I believe he thinks he is remoulding my character. Perhaps he is, though I don't feel like it, but he is a good, kind, queer soul, and has a live heart under that dry, chippy exterior of his. I know he likes me, and I am sometimes inclined to give him a hug!"

"Pray don't!" cried Alicia, who was a little afraid of her sister's impulsiveness.

Kate laughed merrily.

"Just fancy Miss Wincks' face if I did. She is not a bad old thing, either, and would like me, only she is jealous of her brother. How I hope dear papa will manage this matter to Mr. Wincks' satisfaction, and then he may be taken permanently into the office."

The next day was fine, though grey, and at half-past three Alicia started to keep her engagement in Westbourne Terrace. Kate curled herself upon the sofa, and took up the book on which she expected to be examined, just to refresh her memory. It was a solemn work on *The Cultivation and Government of Thought*, from the German of that celebrated philosopher, Von Bosch. Her own thoughts, however, soon escaped from any government their owner exercised over them, and flew to her father, and then swiftly on to Dick Travers. It was a week since she had seen him. Alicia had written to inform him of their father's safe arrival in his native land. Kate had left this task to her sister. She had been a little cautious about her intercourse with

Travers since Alicia's tiresome warnings, but it did seem a long time since she had seen him or Tulloch. Tulloch amused her, and though it is reluctantly admitted by the writer to be not quite high-minded enough for a heroine, she was pleased by the ill-suppressed admiration shown in his looks and speech.

But her musings were broken up by the entrance of the "gurl" with a note.

"Oh! thank you!" cried Kate, starting up to take it, and recognising Dick's writing. Though addressed to her sister, she opened it unhesitatingly. It was brief: "Will you and Kate," it ran, "put yourselves into a cab about seven-twenty this evening, and call at my diggin's, where I shall be ready to go with you to the Prince of Wales's. The new play is excellent. Awfully sorry I can't come out to fetch you, but I shall have a rush to be ready at eight. Don't fail."

Kate stood gazing at the lines with bright but thoughtful eyes. "I am so sorry Alicia will miss it! She enjoys a play—though she is not so wild about plays as I am!—but, of course, I can go! I will leave a note for her to explain things. What o'clock is it? Nearly five! I shall have some tea and thick bread and butter, and then I shall dress. What shall I put on? I haven't much choice. Black? That black skirt is woefully shabby, but the evening body is in high preservation. I shall put some fresh white lace on it, just under the black edging, and there are still some lilies of the valley left in the corner of the garden. I'll not put anything in my hair. I have

nothing that is fit. Then I am sure Alsie would let me have her black mantilla to wrap round me. It will be quite enough—it will cast a halo over my skirt. Thank heaven! I have a new pair of gloves! It is providential that I chose black ones, but they are too short. I must add some lace to them.”

The next moment she was flying down the steps into the garden, from which she soon returned with a handful of the fragrant bell-like lilies, and proceeded to carry out her programme of preparation.

Two hours later the smiling Matilda, who was devoted to the young ladies, had fetched a four-wheeler, not having found a hansom in the semi-civilised neighbourhood, and Kate, with a radiant face, and most carefully attired to the best of her ability, set forth on pleasure bent.

She was sincerely sorry that her sister should have missed so great a treat, but too joyous to be seriously damped by regret.

When the driver drew rein at the door of Travers' lodging in Mount Street, he appeared *in propria persona*.

“What! all alone, Kate!” he exclaimed, as he stepped into the cab, seating himself opposite to her.

“Oh! yes, I am so sorry. But Alicia had gone to a children's party at Miss Golding's, so I thought you would not mind my coming alone, Dick?”

“If you are very good and reasonable I may get over it,” he returned, smiling, while his eyes dwelt on her with something different in their expression from anything she had ever read in them before—

something that made her heart beat, though she would not let her own droop. "I am not looking so badly," was her inner conviction. "He will not be ashamed of me." Meantime they were rolling towards the Tottenham Court Road.

"I did not think so advanced a young lady as you are, Kate, would have deigned to travel in a growler?"

"Do you call this a growler? I tried to find a hansom, but could not. I have brought my little velvet toque, so I can go back in an omnibus if you like."

"No, I don't like. But as I know you are of an economical turn of mind, suppose we walk back?"

"I should not mind in the least if it keeps fine and you come with me."

"Oh, no. I shall send you alone."

"I'm not afraid of that, Dick!"—with an upward glance sweet and mischievous at once.

Arrived at the theatre, they were conducted to a private box, where Travers settled his cousin with her face to the stage and well sheltered by the curtain.

"It's rather high up," he said, "but better than nothing. You'll see pretty well, and I can look over your shoulder."

"It is all delightful," returned Kate. "Don't attempt to speak to me, except between the acts."

"I shall meditate on your many perfections in the interval."

"No. Attend to the drama, and be ready to discuss it with me while the drop scene is down."

The play was Robertson's "Caste," perhaps his best. Kate was absorbed, breathless with interest.

"How human it all is!" she exclaimed, after the second act. "It is the best play I have ever seen."

"Your experience is not great," observed Travers.

"No. Still I am sure this is very good. Don't you like it?"

"Yes. There is something natural and life-like in it."

"But she ought not to have married him," resumed Kate, her large eyes fixed and gazing far away.

"Why?" asked Travers, a little surprised.

"She ought to have guarded him against himself. It was wrong to let him link himself, with such a disreputable father and such surroundings. No, she ought to have had too much consideration for him, too much respect for herself to listen to him."

"You young Spartan! Why should she make him miserable for the sake of her own pride—she might break his heart?"

"Do you think he would be heart-broken? Men don't often break their hearts."

"Come, Kate, don't take up that rubbish about the iniquities of men."

"Who, me? I don't think them iniquitous. They have always been very nice and kind to us. What a dear papa is! And you are rather a dear too, Dick! But men have something else to do than breaking their hearts and crying their eyes out. They ought

to be commonsensical. Still, I am afraid that after a while George would be rather sick of old Eccles and Samuel Geridge, as a brother-in-law. Esther ought to have saved him from that."

"You forget, Kate, that she loved him," said Travers, almost startled by her tone of conviction. "You cannot expect stoicism from the loving heart of a woman."

"Why not? If anything can give strength and perception it is true love," said Kate, thoughtfully; "and imagine what she would feel later on if she saw that he regretted his marriage. Why, life would be intolerable. I should throw myself into the river rather than endure it."

"I believe you would," returned Travers, strongly impressed. "There is a large dash of the devil in you, my sweet cousin."

"These feelings don't come from the devil, Dick; or if they do, the devil is certainly not so black as he is painted; I am always a little sorry for the devil; perhaps, as the Zoroastrians believe, he will be converted some day and drawn into the general scheme of happiness."

"Zoroastrians! You alarm me! I fear you have been diving into the depths of knowledge," said Travers, laughing.

"Don't mock, Dick; you are odious when you are cynical."

"Mock! 'He jests at tears who never felt a wound.' I never felt less inclined to jest than at this moment, believe me." There was sincerity and some-

thing more which she did not quite understand in his voice. Neither spoke for a few minutes; then Travers, after looking down on the stalls steadily, "Do you see a tall young fellow, with an infinitesimal black head? There, on the right of the gangway, third row; take the glasses."

"I can see quite well without them. Who is he?"

"Young Finlay; he is the head of Finlay and Co., the brewers. You see 'Finlay and Co.'s entire' all over the place. He has just succeeded to the proud position on the death of his father. He has a soul above malt, however, and fancies himself as a crack shot; so nothing will do him but sport and exploration on the Gordon-Cumming lines—in Africa. He is busy organising an expedition for the autumn, and has persuaded some rich city fellows to take it up. He was with me yesterday, trying to persuade me to join, and made some tempting offers, I assure you."

"But you will not go?" cried Kate, clasping hands, and looking at him with imploring eyes.

"No. It would be wiser, I fancy, to stay where I am. But—would you object to Africa?"

"Selfishly, I would. We should miss you woe-fully. Though, of course, that need not count for a moment."

"No, of course not, to so strong-minded a young woman as you are, Kate."

"Don't call me names, please."

Travers laughed and was about to speak, then he suddenly checked his words, and as the drop scene was raised soon after, conversation ceased.

"Stand in this corner and keep a look out for me while I look for a hansom with a tolerable horse," said Travers, putting Kate in a nook near the door when all was over. "Now don't move away till I come back."

He soon returned and beckoned to her. They were swiftly *en route*.

"I have picked up a capital animal. He'll bowl us out to Notting Hill in no time."

The steed in question was a large bony beast. So they spun away down the New Road, as it was then called, along Cambridge and Oxford Terraces, and into the Bayswater Road.

"Ah, it was a great treat!" said Kate, after they had got clear of the noisier streets. "I shall often dream of it."

"So shall I, I suspect," returned Travers, drily.

"Should you like to go to Africa?" she resumed, after a pause.

"Well, yes. I suppose there's nothing gets so thoroughly into a fellow's blood as a taste for big game, and Finlay's idea is to do a good deal in that line; but it's all very uncertain. What a pace our cabby's going! Our drive will be over too soon, much too soon." He opened the trap door to speak to the driver when there was a sudden swerve, a shaking of the cab, a stumble forward, and a desperate effort on the part of the horse to recover himself before he came down smashing the shaft. Kate was jerked violently upward and forward, her shoulder coming in contact with one of the curved irons

which keep the front window down when lowered in its place. The shaft breaking at once saved them from a complete overturn. Travers threw back the doors and sprang out in a moment. "Don't be in a hurry. Give me your hands and jump," he cried. Kate obeyed, but giddy from the start and severe pain of her shoulder she stumbled on reaching the ground. "Are you all right?" he asked, catching her in his arms and straining her to him. "Darling, are you hurt?" he added in a lower tone, as for an instant she did not move. The words had passed his lips before he recovered self-control.

"Yes, a little. I am all right, Dick. I can stand now, thank you."

"I don't think you can," for he felt that she was trembling from head to foot, and still held her tenderly, though he relaxed his hold. "Is it your arm?" touching her.

"It is the shoulder," she replied, a quiver of pain in her voice. "But it is not so bad now; I can stand quite well; do see to the poor driver and the horse."

This passed in a quarter the time taken to describe it. She disengaged herself, and went not too steadily across the footway to rest against the low wall beneath the railings of Kensington Gardens.

The driver had escaped injury, and was already endeavouring to undo the harness. Travers went to his assistance, and between them they soon had the horse on his feet. After examining him as well as they could with the help of one of the lamps, they found he was but slightly hurt.

"What will you do with the cab at this hour?" asked Travers, as he paid the man his full fare.

"Thank 'ee, sir. I must just leave it where it is. I'll fasten a lamp behind and before, just to warn drivers. There are stables near by where I'll take the horse, and may be one of the men will come back with me to help to wheel it in."

"Any chance of another cab?"

"Don't think there is much, sir; it's past twelve. You might pick up a return empty, but anything down from town will be occupied."

"I suppose so. Hope it won't be an expensive job to you."

"It won't be cheap. Good-night, sir."

"Do you feel equal to walking, Kate?" asked Travers. "I'm afraid there is very little chance of finding a conveyance."

She was leaning sideways against the parapet, but stood up as he approached.

"Oh, yes; I can walk quite well. I was dizzy what with fright (I am ashamed to say I was frightened) and a blow on my shoulder, but I am myself now. It cannot be more than a mile and a half further to Oakley Villas. Is the driver unhurt, and the poor, dear horse?"

"Yes, they are safe and sound; you are the only sufferer."

"Come, then; we had better go on."

"Take my arm."

"Thank you. Oh, not this arm; I cannot move it. Is it not fortunate that my right arm has escaped?"

"I see nothing fortunate in the affair," said Travers, gloomily. He was furious at having lost hold of himself. After months of the most careful self-control, of the most successful concealment of feelings, the strength of which he scarcely knew—a moment's overpowering impulse had betrayed all. Kate must be dull indeed if she did not understand the meaning of his eager anxiety; and now there was the dangerous delight of this long, lonely walk, when all the world was sleeping. Was he not bound to say something explanatory of the feeling he had betrayed. They walked on in silence, as he pondered these things.

"It must be difficult to upset a hansom," she exclaimed at last, in an easy natural voice. "I thought our last hour had come when the horse fell but we did not go over."

Travers was surprised, relieved, and just a little piqued.

"I suppose living in London has spoiled my nerves," continued Kate. "I did not think I was so cowardly. Then everything seems worse in the dark, don't you think so?"

"No doubt," returned Travers, absently.

"I hope Alsie is not sitting up for me!" Kate ran on. "Mrs. Salter gave me the latch key, so I feel like a young man about town. If Alsie is awake she will fancy all sorts of things, because I shall be so late."

"I hope she will be up," said Travers, "for I am sure your bruises ought to be attended to."

Kate quickened her pace and continued to talk lightly and pleasantly on many subjects enlarging on Mr. Wincks' peculiarities and never leaving the initiative to Travers for a moment. He followed her lead, not without a slight sense of irritation at being led, yet thankful to believe that no mischief had been done. For mischievous it would be, to add to this young creature's troubles and difficulties, to entangle her in a hopeless lingering engagement.

"She looks on me as a sort of useful bachelor cousin, and no more. So much the better. I am rather an unlucky fellow; she had better keep clear of me," he thought. Gradually Travers took his share in the conversation, though Kate assisted largely in keeping it going.

At last they were at the garden gate of Oakley Villas.

An ejaculation of "Thank God," in an undertone, escaped Kate's lips as they paused to open it.

"I am afraid you are suffering horribly," said Travers.

"Oh! no, not so very much, but I am glad the walk is over; here is the key; I think Alicia must have gone to bed, it is quite dark."

She was wrong; as Travers opened the hall door gently, one opposite, which led into the chief sitting-room also opened, letting a line of light stream down the hall and show the figure of Alicia as she stood against it, her hand on the lock.

"So glad you have come!" she exclaimed, ad-

vancing to meet them. "I have been listening for a cab, and beginning to think you were very late."

"We have had a spill," said Travers, "and I am afraid Kate's shoulder is badly hurt."

"A spill!" repeated Alicia, somewhat dismayed. "Come in to the light and let me see. Why, Katey dear, you are terribly white. Let me see——"

"Not here!" returned Kate, steadying herself against the back of a high chair. "I shall go away to bed. A good night's rest will put me all right. I was frightened, and I am tired. Good-night, Dick, and thank you for giving me such a treat."

"Which? The play or the spill?" he asked, as he took her hand. "I am awfully sorry about this mischance. Don't be ashamed of being frightened, when you have the pluck to hide it. Let me stay here, Alicia, till you ascertain what harm is done. Come back and let me know."

"I will," she returned, and followed her sister upstairs.

Travers paced the room in anything but a happy frame of mind. If ever there was an unlucky fellow, he was one. Would it be wiser to cut and run away to Africa? No! He could not desert these rather helpless relatives. They had no real friend in the huge brick and mortar wilderness save himself. Already he had saved Carey from several imprudences, and now that he had made a little success he was likely to commit many more. No, he would stand by them. He ought to be strong enough to mask his own weakness. At any rate, Kate had no idea

of it, and happily regarded him as a friend only—so——

“It is a very bad bruise, but no more,” said Alicia, coming into the room noiselessly behind him. “Just in the hollow, under the point of the shoulder. I shall put on some brown paper and vinegar, and get her to bed. I do not think it will signify much. She says you are not to trouble about her.”

“Would it not be well to get a surgeon. There are lots of them about. I could find one close by, I dare say.”

“I don’t think it is the least necessary.”

“Then I had better leave you! Alicia, you will be sure to send me a line to-morrow? For unless you really want me, I shall be too busy to come out here.”

“You may depend on me, Dick. She will be much better to-morrow, though it is very painful now. Good-night.”

“Good-night. I hope for a better report to-morrow.”

Having locked and chained the front door and turned off the gas, Alicia went quickly upstairs.

Kate was standing before the dressing-table, one hand resting on it.

“I cannot get my dress off!” she said in a low unsteady voice; “my shoulder is so stiff. Will you draw down my sleeve?”

Her sister tenderly and carefully assisted her.

“Thank you,” murmured Kate. “I am afraid I startled you!” Then she suddenly burst into tears, and threw herself into her sister’s arms.

"Why, Katey dear! this is not like you!" cried Alicia, greatly surprised.

"No, it is not. But I was so frightened, and—and upset! It was quite dark, you know, and I am growing weak and cowardly. But I shall be all right and my own old self to-morrow. Will you do up my hair, dear, or it will be in such a tangle? Oh, all I want is to get to sleep, and not to think. Thinking is sometimes very bad. Put out the light, Alicia dear. I want to be quite quiet!"

CHAPTER IX.

A DISCOVERY.

ALICIA CAREY slept soundly after sitting up to an unusually late hour, and the unpleasant excitement of Kate's accident. She awoke with a start, and an almost guilty consciousness that she had neglected her sister; that she was unfeeling and reprehensible for being able to sleep so unbrokenly when her Kate was probably suffering.

She raised herself on her elbow, and looked across to her sister's bed, hoping to see her wrapt in slumber, but instead she encountered a pair of extremely bright, wide-awake, laughing eyes.

"Well, you have slept like a top, Alsie!" exclaimed Kate. "It did me good to see such 'rapture of repose.'"

"Oh, Katey, I hope you did not want anything. You should have roused me if you did. I am ashamed of myself for having gone off in that way, and yet I was quite anxious about you when I went to sleep. How do you feel?"

"You could not have done anything for me, dear. I was a little restless and wakeful, and, of course, my shoulder is stiff, but I am better, and I will get up."

"You have quite a high colour. I am afraid you are feverish, dear," and Alsie looked anxiously at her, struck with the brilliancy of her eyes, the rich rose-tint of her cheeks. "I will get you a cup of tea as soon as I can, and you shall keep quiet!" She slipped out of bed as she spoke.

"Nonsense!" cried Kate. "I am dying to be up and about! I am, oh! so sick of thinking and trying not to think. I feel particularly energetic!"

"That is not a good sign. You had better stay in bed."

But Kate had her way, as she generally had, and was ready for breakfast almost as soon as her sister. On the table they found a letter from Carey, announcing his return at the end of the week, to his daughters' great joy.

"It will be nice to have the dear father back again," cried Kate. "Don't say a word to him about my having hurt myself! It is your turn to write to him to-day. I have some work to do for Mr. Wincks."

"Can you manage it?"

"Oh, yes, quite well. My right arm is perfectly uninjured. I promised to take the papers back this evening, and that book Mr. Wincks wished me to read."

Alicia looked earnestly at her sister. She was a little puzzled by the contrast between her complete breakdown the previous night and her almost joyous energy not eight hours after. However, this slight uneasiness passed away when Kate sat down as soon as breakfast was cleared away and settled steadily to

her work, while the elder applied herself to her letter before going out on some housekeeping errand.

"Whom are you writing to now, Alicia?" asked Kate, observing that she took fresh paper as soon as she had addressed and closed the letter to her father.

"I promised to write to Dick this morning to save his coming out here. He was so troubled about you last night."

"Pray tell him I am nearly quite myself. He is not to trouble about me, but just to mind his business. He said he was going to be very busy," and Kate resumed her writing with much diligence.

The day passed as usual, and after their high tea Kate put on her hat and set out for Paragon Place, declaring that she felt "perfectly fit."

It was a lovely evening—the deepening blue of the sky—the changing colours of the sunset—the perfume of the lilacs and laburnums in the little gardens which are attached to most of the houses in this western suburb had an unusual charm for Kate, and seemed to sink into her heart with a magic of sweetness and sadness such as she had never felt before.

Mr. Wincks had come home unusually early, his sister told her young visitor. He had felt ill and faint at the office—she supposed because of the sudden heat—but his tea and a favourite author seemed to have revived him, and he was quite ready to see Miss Carey.

Though Miss Wincks had become comparatively

friendly, she never so far relaxed from her dignity as to call Kate by her Christian name.

Mr. Wincks was sitting in the drawing-room near the open window enjoying the scent of the flowers. Paragon Place was a quiet sleepy corner through which there was no traffic. He had a book on his knee and a glass of lemonade on a small table beside him. The light was still clear enough to let Kate see how pale and haggard he looked. Her kind heart was stirred by his air of suffering, and as he smiled and stretched out his hand to her she laid down her roll of copying and impulsively took it in both her own. "I am so sorry you are ill," she exclaimed, pressing it tenderly. "I should not have disturbed you had I known," and she looked into his eyes with such genuine sympathy that the little man experienced a curious pleasant sensation of soothing warmth.

"You don't disturb me," said Mr. Wincks, with a little wintry smile. "I am only a little weak, that is all. Let me see what you have done—and—sit down." Kate opened her scroll and spread it before him.

"Hum! You are greatly improved in writing—one could scarcely think this was done by a girl. Ah! I don't think I have settled with you for the last two jobs." He slowly pulled out his purse.

"Pray do not trouble about it now. I am not in a hurry!"

"That sounds well. You manage to make both ends meet, hey?"

"Thanks to you. Yes! I have even saved up a little," added Kate, blushing in a charming manner.

"I am glad to hear it—very glad. The man or woman who can gather a little money together has valuable qualities, and so long as they do not develop selfishness will do well. There—there's your fee. I see you have brought back Abercrombie. How have you got on with him?"

"At first I found the book rather dry and difficult, but gradually I began to understand and like it. How hard he must have thought to work out all the problems he treats of. I always wonder how people think consecutively. If a thought comes into my head, before I have time to look at it clearly it calls up another and then another, and they all dance round till I scarcely remember what I started from." And she laughed a sweet fresh laugh.

"It is something to be able to describe your own mental confusion," said Mr. Wincks. A kindly expression gleamed in his small keen eyes. "But one, perhaps the greatest, obstacle to mental development and progress in this flaccidity of thought. All rational individuals ought to be able to marshal their thinking faculties and direct them along certain lines. To take an idea and study it, viewing it in various lights, bringing previous mental acquirements to bear upon it, and resisting all temptation to wander down the by-ways, the tiny footpaths of idle thought, which are for ever branching off on the right hand and on the left. Imagine the enormous acquisitions which might be added to the storehouse of observation and

deduction if men could only master their thoughts instead of being at the mercy of an unruly crowd of self-suggesting ideas, which flit to and fro like unsubstantial shadows."

Kate listened with profound attention. Mr. Wincks rarely made so long a speech.

"You must have thought a great deal yourself," she said, "and I suppose you are right; but would it not be dreadfully tiresome to be always keeping one's thoughts in order? I am sure I never could. Besides, I fancy that it may be in wandering hither and thither in the playtime of thought that poetry is found, like wild flowers in the woods, away from fenced-in roads and their milestones. And discoveries! Don't they come often unsought to wanderers, too? When roaming aimlessly or groping in darkness they happen upon unexpected treasures or sudden bursts of light."

"You seem to think yourself," he returned, though there was a tinge of displeasure in his tone. "But I should like to see you more alive to the value of order in everything, especially thought. You seem to have marshalled your forces against it."

"Oh, no. I never marshal anything. I didn't know I had ever thought about thinking till you said what you did. But, indeed, I wish I could regulate my thoughts," she added, with a sigh and a tone of profound sincerity. "I will try as hard as I can."

"I am glad to hear you say so, and hope you

may succeed. In fact, I have strong faith in the power of will, honestly exerted."

"I will tell you how I get on," said Kate, with a frank smile. "But I am afraid you have no idea how weak and illogical I am."

"If you acknowledge these defects you have taken one step towards correcting them." Mr. Wincks said this in a somewhat faint tone, and leant back in his chair as if weary, putting aside his book.

"I am staying too long, and making you talk too much," exclaimed Kate, rising.

"No, you do not tire me; but the light is fading and I do not care to have the gas lit. I rather wanted to finish this chapter."

"May I read it to you?" interrupted Kate. "I can see quite well."

"Thank you, I should be glad if you would. Then I shall, I think, go to bed."

So Kate read for the better part of an hour. When she had closed the book Mr. Wincks thanked her, and there was a short pause, and he resumed, "Your father returns on Thursday. I am glad I sent him on this mission; I believe he has saved my client from making a serious mistake. I did not think he had such a shrewd business side to his character."

"Oh! papa is very clever. I have often heard clever people say so; but he is too trusting."

"Not a usual fault in a lawyer."

"I suppose not," she returned, laughing. "But

I am so glad he has been able to serve you in any way, for you have indeed served us!"

Wincks thought for a moment, and then said, "Mr. Brett was in my office a day or two before Mr. Carey left for Ireland, and seemed greatly surprised at seeing him there."

"I do not see that he should be, considering he proposed recommending my father to you himself."

"I suppose he changed his mind?" said Mr. Wincks, drily.

"He had no right to do so. He just went away for a long time and omitted to fulfil his promise. Rich men forget the necessities of their poorer brethren often. I hope you do not regret your kind confidence in—me?"

"No, my dear young lady, I do not."

She had never heard her curious old patron speak so warmly before. She bade him a cordial good-night and departed.

Instead of taking the most direct way home she turned to the left instinctively, choosing a longer route, for she wanted to be alone.

"I wish I could rule my thoughts," she said to herself, as she strolled on into the soft darkness of the warm night; "but I cannot; I cannot put Dick Travers out of my head. I always liked him, but I never thought it would come to this—that his eyes seem always looking into mine, his voice for ever sounding in my heart. I have always thought of him a good deal, but since last night——" Again memory recalled the close, tender pressure

of his arms, the passion in his voice when he called her "darling." How often had she thrilled at the recollection since. Was she foolish, mistaken, in fancying that he loved her? No; try as she would to reason away the impression, she felt that for the moment at least Dick loved her. Ah! life passed with him would be only too gloriously delightful; but it could not be. How loyal and kind he had been to them all in their trials and troubles. Well, she must repay him by saving him all the pain she could. It would be ruin to him to ally himself with such unfortunate, broken-down people as themselves.

"I wouldn't let him, even if he were so silly as to think of such a thing—he is far too sensible to dream of it. I don't want him to worry about me, and probably he will get over it all soon; they say men are inconstant, and he sees such heaps of charming women. Of course, he will forget me, but I shall never find any man like him; he is so strong and bright, and knows so much about the real world of living people. There is a sort of careless power about him, I am afraid he could make me do anything he liked; but that is wrong, and he must never know—never, never! Ah, Dick, I do love you; and you may forget, soon forget, but you do love me now. I wish I might hear him say so once, though I should be half frightened. His voice is wonderfully expressive—I have heard Alsie say it was, and she never exaggerates. He will come soon, perhaps, to see how I am; and I must

be very careful and indifferent. At any rate I shall see him now and then, but I will be strong and disagreeable. I never could desert my father and Alsie. Even if Dick had some appointment and could marry, he could not marry us all, and could I leave those dear things to poverty and struggle, and go away to peace and heavenly happiness by myself. It would be heaven to be always with Dick, and belong to him—to be his comrade. Ah! what folly all this is; I must rule my thoughts. It is all impossible. I must submit to the unspeakable curse of poverty. 'To bear is to conquer our Fate.' Shall I ever conquer myself?—ever put Dick away out of my heart? I don't wish to put him away, I'll always love him, and think of him to keep my soul alive; but I must harden my face against him and be strong."

This doughty resolution brought her to the corner of the old pleasure ground at the back of their house, and she could see that the sitting-room was lighted up, and descry the figure of a man sitting at the table. It must be Travers! She wished he had not come so soon, even while she quivered with joy at the thought of seeing him. She stopped to collect her thoughts, and steady her nerves. All this day she had suffered a good deal of pain in her shoulder, and had struggled gallantly to keep a cheerful front to her sister, and now there was a fresh demand on her strength, but she must—she would rise to the occasion. Drawing a long breath, she walked on slowly to the house. Admitting her-

self with a latch-key, she opened the drawing-room door, and found Alicia administering tea to Jamie Tulloch.

"So you've missed Travers!" exclaimed that gentleman, starting up to greet her. "He's gone to look for you. How did you miss him?"

"The evening was so fine I came back another and a longer way," returned Kate, sinking into a chair with a sense of not being able to bear much more.

"Very foolish of you!" cried Alicia, "when you know you have been suffering all day with that shoulder. Have a cup of tea! It is nearly three hours since we had ours!"

"What's wrong with your shoulder?" asked Tulloch. Whereupon Alicia gave a full account of the accident, while Kate drank her tea in silence.

"Well!" exclaimed Tulloch, "I flatter myself I would have taken better care of you than that. I thought Travers too keen and quick a chap not to have saved you from so nasty a bruise!"

"How could he?" said Kate, rather indignantly. "We both pitched forward before we knew where we were, and then, as the seat was unusually high, or that iron thing low, I came against it. The bruise is not so bad. The pain is much better. I hope Dick will not wait about too long."

"Oh, of course, Dick Travers is always right!" returned Tulloch, with a laugh.

"Yes, very often, at least," said Kate, defiantly.

"At any rate, in your eyes," added Tulloch.

"We expect papa on Saturday," she remarked, to change the subject. "It will be delightful to have him at home again, and then, Jamie, we must have that expedition to the Crystal Palace."

"Yes, we must," agreed Tulloch. He paused, contemplating Kate earnestly with a slight knitting of the brows. "I say," he continued, "you are looking white, and bad enough."

"What an uncivil speech!" she exclaimed, rising to put down her cup, and then moving to the window, where the curtain shaded her from the gas-light. As she did so the front door bell rang, and in a minute or two Travers came in.

"I have been unsuccessful," he began, looking round with some anxiety; then perceiving Kate, he came quickly to her. "How did I miss you?" he exclaimed, taking her hand, and placing himself well between her and Tulloch. "You are not suffering so much, Alicia tells me?" and he looked eagerly into her eyes, as if he would draw out the secrets of her heart.

Kate, though keeping herself very still and tranquil, felt the quick blood mount to her cheek with a rush, while Tulloch remarked, "She looks as white as a ghost, though," a speech that heightened Kate's feeling of uneasiness.

"I don't think I do, now!" she exclaimed, laughing, to mask her embarrassment; "I feel quite ashamed of making a fuss, and bearing pain so badly; I am really better, so please say no more about it."

"Eh!" cried Tulloch. "But I cannot help say-

ing that a knowing chap like you, Travers, should have taken better care of a young lady."

"Oh, you do, do you?" returned Travers, with quite ineffable contempt.

"I am quite satisfied with the care Cousin Dick has always taken of me," said Kate. "How did you get back last night, Dick?"

"I walked, and somehow, I enjoyed the walk, though I was vexed with myself for not insisting on bringing a doctor to see you."

"It was quite unnecessary," murmured Kate. "I shall have forgotten all about it in a day or two."

"I shall not," returned Travers in a low tone, which only reached Kate's ear, for Tulloch, whose voice was loud and rasping, had begun to discuss plans for their day at the Crystal Palace with Alicia.

"It was a delightful evening, certainly," said Kate, steadily, and cheerfully, nerving herself and avoiding her cousin's eyes, "until we were nearly spilt, and I intend only to remember the pleasant part. Have you been to see 'Caste,' Jamie?" she asked, to break up the virtual *tête-à-tête* with Travers.

"No, I don't care much for the theatre," said Tulloch. "It all seems such foolery, and to see people wiping their eyes and blowing their noses at the sorrows of a hero and heroine, whom they know will be as jolly as sand boys over oysters and stout in half an hour at latest, is just an amazement to me."

"Ah! Jamie. You have no imagination!" and

Kate came across the room as she spoke, and sat down in a corner of the sofa.

"No, thank God!" ejaculated Tulloch.

"Instead of thanking God, Jamie, you ought to pray to him for that grand gift," she returned in a languid manner, as if it was a trouble to speak.

"Oh, I leave such grand gifts to superior fellows like Travers here."

"Have you a great deal of imagination, Dick?" asked Alicia, smiling.

"I am sure I don't know," he returned.

"Yes, you have," said Kate, positively. "You are like me. You believed that Marie Wilton was Polly, and Esther really Esther last night. I know you did. We are so much the richer than Jamie, Dick. My poor Jamie, I will cultivate your imagination. Will you let me?" and she smiled radiantly on him.

"You may do what you like with me!" exclaimed Tulloch, gazing at her admiringly. "I shall be wax in your hands."

"So much the better for you. What a large lump of wax, Dick! I ought to make something magnificent of it, only I am afraid I shall find a great nugget of Aberdeen granite hidden away in the middle, eh! Jamie?"

"You're a far-seeing young lady!" cried Tulloch, much flattered; "but it won't be granite to such a bonnie lassie as you. When is my training to begin?"

"Oh! when you like! to-morrow," said Kate, carelessly.

"To-morrow I'm dining at Mistress MacKilligen's—it's a big dinner, I believe—and I'm to meet some leading city people, MacKilligen tells me. It will be a good introduction, and useful in my business."

"Ah! there—there's a little root of imagination," said Kate. "Fancy paints all these metropolitan magnates rushing to fill his coffers. Ah! Jamie, I'll make a poet of you yet!"

"I hope not! Though for real poetry there's nothing better than a Scotsman—Bobbie Burns."

"Yes, we all know that. I have nothing to do to-morrow, Jamie. Suppose you come up in the afternoon, and begin training?"

"Don't you tempt a fellow away from his business," cried Tulloch, his eyes beaming, and moving to place himself beside his young kinswoman. "It's hard to say no, but I'll say it. The evening after——"

"Oh, no! Papa will arrive that day, and we must have time all to ourselves. Come any other evening you like. Now I shall leave you three to settle all about our *fête* at Norwood. I am too tired to keep my eyes open any longer. I must say good-night," and as she spoke Travers rose, and went to the door, which he held open. Kate shook hands with Tulloch, exclaiming in a querulous tone: "Oh, dear, I wish you would remember I wear rings."

"Good-night, Kate," said Travers, coming into the hall. "What is the matter? You are not a bit like yourself. You are not suffering, Kate?"

"Oh, no; not a bit."

He put out his hand murmuring: "I shall not forget you wear rings." She flashed a glance into his eyes that suggested something of pain and seriousness—a glance that dwelt with him—and put her hand into his for an instant. The next, she ran swiftly upstairs.

Returning to the sitting-room, Travers joined Alicia and Tulloch in some conversation respecting their plans, and came to the conclusion that they must wait for Mr. Carey to fix the day. Then Travers and Tulloch took leave of Alicia, and walked away together.

For some way Jamie Tulloch was silent, and thoughtful. At last he burst out—

"I do not know that I ever met quite her like before."

"Whose like?" asked Travers, drily.

"Why, Kate Carey's, to be sure. You needn't be put out about it, man."

"Why should I?"

"Well, no. It's no affair of yours. Though you have been such chums; but I must say she is about the most charming girl I ever met; there's something so frank and straight about her; doesn't mind showing a chap she likes him, which heartens him up, and shows she's discriminating."

"Oh, so you think Kate 'likes' you?"

"I don't fancy there is much doubt about it," returned Tulloch, in a tone of exultation. "You must be pretty blind not to see the drift of all her chaff this evening. She wants me up there to teach

me, don't you see. I'll tell you she has taught me a goodish bit more than she knows."

"Indeed! Then you are condescending enough to accept her proffered affection?"

"Why, Travers, I believe you are a bit jealous. That's all folly, man. You couldn't go in for a wife without money, and you shouldn't stand in a girl's light; besides, you see she considers you a friend, and nothing more; to say nothing of your being four or five years older than I am, eh? What do you say; you are not such an ass as to think of marrying, nor such a conceited idiot as to fancy Kate Carey would ever accept you. Maybe you are right; dare-say you are; at any rate it is not wise to lose one's heart to a girl that hasn't a penny. But I have always been a fool about a pretty face, and though Kate has no money, she isn't accustomed to luxuries, and seems very economical. After all, money is not everything. Of course, the father and sister are a drawback, but if I ever think seriously of the matter, I'll have it clearly understood that I am not going to marry the whole family."

"I fancy that Kate knows you well enough by this time not to expect any irrational degree of devotion on your part," said Travers, with much gravity.

"That's just it. She is a 'vara' sensible young lady," returned Jamie, who was apt to grow more Scotch as he was stirred to wrath or gentler emotion.

"Probably; but the most sensible girls are 'kittle cattle,' at least so people who profess to know them say—don't make too sure."

“Ay! that’s just what I am not—I mean—I am not that sure of myself. You see there’s nothing I’d like better than to make the Bonnie Bird my wife—but there’s the business! It’s hard when all expenses come out of one purse, and for a while I’ll need all the capital I can get hold of to push the house. Eh, man! I see my way to a big thing, and I am loath to lose it. So you see I’m just torn two ways. It’s grand to have a wise-like fellow like yourself to talk over things, with as good a friend to her as to me—and then a steady settled chap of your sort isn’t given to fancy himself in love—or anything of that kind!”

“Much obliged for your high opinion. If, however, you are so sure of Kate’s ‘tendresse’ for you, don’t you think that you may ‘break her heart entirely,’ as her compatriots say, if you decide not to elevate her to the exalted position of Mrs. Jamie Tulloch?”

“There’s an odd sneering way with you, Travers, at times that I can’t say I like,” exclaimed Tulloch. “No girl has a right to break her heart about a man who has never asked her downright to marry him.”

“What a splendid definition of men’s right! Here! hi! hansom! Sorry to leave you so abruptly. I know you like a ’bus—there’s one coming up—good-night,” and the next moment Tulloch was standing alone and thinking. “He might have given me a lift into town—it wouldn’t have cost him a penny! I hate selfishness and meanness!”

CHAPTER X.

THE WANDERER'S RETURN.

THE sisters metaphorically killed the fatted calf (or rather, translated him into a boiled chicken, with white sauce and sausages), to welcome their parent home. Warm indeed was the welcome which he received, while his joyous youthful aspect completed the satisfaction of the meeting.

"You look lovely, dear," cried Kate, as she helped him to remove his dust coat, "and don't seem a bit tired after your long journey."

"Tired! Not a bit, faith! How should I be when I knew I was coming home to my darlings; only I thought the engine went slow—far too slow. Alsie, my precious, you're a trifle pale. You've not been dragging your heart out trying to drive music into the heads of these stupid Londoners? Ah! my jewels! If I go on and prosper as I am doing divil a note you shall teach to mortal man, woman, or child. Well, Kate, how is old Wincks? I think he sees now that he got hold of the right man when he sent me to look into matters at Ballykilldoolan. Of all the thieves that scamp of an agent was the worst."

"Oh! I think Mr. Wincks is very pleased with

you indeed, papa; and he does his best to educate me. But he is neither well nor strong."

"Eh?" putting his hand to his ear. Kate repeated her words.

"Pleased, is he? Faith! I hope he'll prove it. Now, girls, I'll just go and brush the dust off me, and wash my hands; so call for dinner, I'm as hungry as a hunter."

Dinner was a highly cheerful feast, and highly appreciated by the returned wanderer. He had much to tell: one moment he recounted a droll story, with radiant smiles and the keenest sense of fun, the next he described the sadness of visiting the scenes of his past prosperity and happiness with genuine pathos.

"Faith! I wouldn't go back to live in the old place not for a pension—at least not under five thousand a year. The country is turned upside down; nothing but Papists in the best posts just riding rough shod over the real gentry. It's enough to turn your heart inside out."

"However, the Papists had a very bad time of it for many a year," said Alicia, but Carey did not hear her.

"I had no end of kind attention paid me," he went on. "I might have dined out every day in Dublin, and I must say I was greatly tempted to give a nice little dinner to all my old friends at Morrisons. I forget what it's called now, but the thoughts of you, my darling girls, stopped me. I said to myself, 'No!' I'll bring back my bit of savings to them, and, faith,

they shall have a new gown apiece! There they are," pulling out a little leather bag, tied with a diminutive thong, carefully twisted round it, and pouring the contents upon the cloth, with a magnificent air of generosity that gave the effect of a shower of gold and silver.

"I did my best, but I'm afraid I only contrived, with all my endeavours, to scrape six pounds seventeen and fourpence halfpenny together. Alsie, you take it, and go away to-morrow, and buy an elegant dress each of you!"

"Oh, thank you, you dear!" cried Kate, while Alicia pressed his hand. "We will not spend a vast sum like that on mere frocks. We must see what we all want most, and distribute the plunder. Oh, dear, it is nice to have you safe back."

"Ah, my heart, it's good for me! Sure no one ever makes me hear so well as my own girls! I must say I'm a good deal deafer to an English voice than I am to an Irish one."

When the pleasant little dinner was over, there was a great outpouring of news. Though Carey had been kept well posted up in the occurrences of the last fortnight, there were still many trifling details to be told, all profoundly interesting to the hearer.

"I suppose Travers looked you up, and Tulloch?"

"Jamie was only here once, I think, but Dick was very good," returned Kate.

"Yes, Cousin Dick asked us to go to the theatre one evening. I was engaged, so Kate went, and

returning the cab broke down. Kate's shoulder was hurt, and is still stiff and painful," said Alicia.

"Eh? I thought Travers would have taken better care of my little girl."

"Yes, but he did take very good care of me, papa! He could not help the shaft breaking."

"No, no more he could. There isn't a better fellow in the world than Dick Travers. Why didn't you ask him to dine here to-day?"

"I thought of asking him," returned Alicia, "but Kate said he would be sure to be busy or engaged, or something, and we should only give him the trouble of writing to say no."

"I dare say she was right, and now, my darlings, I'll just take forty winks. Three hundred and twenty-four miles in eleven hours is pretty hard going for an old fellow that is nearer seventy than sixty. Then give me a cup of tea, and I'll put a few papers and memoranda in order to be ready to start early in the morning for the office."

Mr. Carey was accordingly settled in the least uneasy chair, a cushion placed judiciously under his head, a footstool under his feet, and the blind drawn down to shade the westering sunlight. Then the girls went softly away to unpack the dear dad's duds, to put them in their places, and to ascertain what damage had been sustained at the hands of strange laundresses, an occupation which was sufficiently absorbing. They had nearly accomplished their task, and daylight was fading when the "gurl" knocked ponderously at the door.

"Please, Miss, Mr. Travers is downstairs."

"How nice and kind of him," exclaimed Alicia. "Papa will be so pleased. I am so sorry we did not ask him to dinner." This in a slightly reproachful tone to Kate, who only said, "Run down then, Alsie! I shall just finish putting away these shirts, and follow you directly."

Alicia found her father, his abundant grey locks a little dishevelled, standing in conversation with Travers, his blue eyes still beaming welcome on his favourite guest. Travers greeted Alicia, while his glance still rested on the door with an expectant look.

"Where's Kate?" asked her father.

"Putting away your shirts."

"Putting on her skirt? Sure she needn't be making herself smart for an old friend like Dick."

"I don't flatter myself that Kate would bestow such a mark of distinction on me," said Travers, laughing. And he repeated her sister's phrase.

"See that! I must be growing deafer or I wouldn't mistake what one of my own girls said. Go call her. Tell her not to trouble about my belongings and get us some tea. Alsie, I want a cup to clear my brains; what with the journey and the sleep they feel all in a maze." He resumed his chair and began to give Travers a *résumé* of his Irish experiences. When Kate came into the room she had certainly not changed her dress, but she had put some subtle touches to her hair and pinned a rose and a spray of fern among the folds of her

corsage, creating an indefinable yet perceptible change in her aspect, Alicia thought.

"Come along, Katey darling. Here's Cousin Dick come out all the way into these wilds; run off from an elegant mob of duchesses and countesses, faith, to see his country cousins, and you staying away to put the old father's duds straight."

"You see Dick's visit is to you, papa," returned Kate, shaking hands with Travers, "so I did not hurry myself."

"And you are quite right now, are you?" asked Travers. "Have you told your father what an indifferent guardian I made?"

"Alicia did! But I am all right now—just a little stiff."

"It strikes me," said Travers, "that you are not looking as blooming as usual." His eyes dwelt on her, with a gloomy questioning expression which called up the rich quick colour to her cheek, and she turned away, exclaiming, "Don't look so stern and disapproving, Cousin Dick! I will try and recover my natural milkmaid aspect, by the time you come again!"

"How is Jamie Tulloch?" asked Mr. Carey, "Is he settled in his new home yet?"

"I don't fancy he has selected one," returned Travers, drawing a chair to the table where Alicia was busy with the tea. "He has the fear of his future wife before his eyes, and the possibility of being obliged to pay forfeit, if she won't live in the house he has chosen."

"Ah, ha. Our friend Jamie is canny enough," said Carey, with a knowing nod of the head. "He'll not throw away his cash."

"And quite right, too," exclaimed Kate, with some warmth. "If I ever have any money to keep I intend to be a perfect miser. There is nothing so dreadful as poverty—everyone ought to avoid it," she added, with a toss of her head, as she took a large cup of tea to her father.

"Faith, then I'm afraid you think your old dad about the blackest of sinners, for to hold money is just what I never could do."

"I don't think anything of the kind. You are the dearest dad in all the world—that's all I know."

"Logic never was your strong point, eh, Kate?" said Travers, smiling, as he sometimes did, rather cynically.

"No, I daresay not. My heart is too strong, and my head too weak, for logic, and I do not regret it!"

"Really, it is quite amusing to hear you and Kate sparring!" cried Alicia. "You used to agree on all points."

"Alas! how light a cause may move
Dissension between hearts that love"

quoted Travers in a mock heroic tone.

"Which stood the storm when waves were rough,
Yet in a sunny hour fall off"

added Kate, with a smile and glance, thrillingly ex-

pressive of grateful memories. "Never mind Jamie's thriftiness. He can be kind as well as canny. I must write and tell him you have returned, papa! I daresay he will come out to-morrow evening to see you."

"I fear not," said Travers. "I met Tulloch this afternoon. He was in a great state of glorification, as he is to dine with some magnate, being invited suddenly, but he is highly pleased at being admitted anyhow into the holy of holies in Mammon's sanctum."

"Why, Dick, you are really ill-natured," cried Kate, opening her big eyes.

Travers burst into a frank hearty laugh. "Yes," he said, "I confess I am. I had better cry *peccavi*, and throw myself on your cruel mercy, Kate; you have been developing on a fresh line lately. At your age, it is impossible to foresee your future mental condition."

"Well, Dick, I am not a baby."

"Yes, a charming, fascinating baby," he repeated.

Kate flushed up, and a fiery gleam sparkled in her eyes, but she exclaimed, with a quiet nod, "If I am charming and fascinating, I don't mind being a baby."

"Ah! you smooth-tongued flatterer," said her father, laughing; "don't bring your fine-drawn compliments here."

"I hope, Dick, you will not let Jamie Tulloch escape our projected excursion to the Crystal Palace. I long for some hours among grass and trees; the gardens are lovely."

At this remote period of history the Palace on Sydenham Hill was looked upon by holiday-makers as an earthly paradise.

"I don't fancy he wants to escape. He was talking of it the other day; all we wait for is Mr. Carey's appointment of the day."

"Well, my dear boy, I can say nothing till I have seen Wincks. I've have a good lot of business to transact and matters to arrange before I can fix any time. I can tell you, Travers, I expect that my management of this affair will put me in an excellent position, and Kate thinks so too, don't you, my jewel?"

But Kate had slipped from the room, and did not return till Alicia called her.

"I see you don't forgive me for taking such indifferent care of you," said Travers, with malice prepense, "though you speak me fair, with that deep-dyed hypocrisy which, with other vile qualities, are making a settlement in your virgin soul."

"Don't say such disagreeable things, Dick," she exclaimed, more earnestly than she thought. "You know I don't blame you a bit."

"No, I know nothing of the kind; you won't come down to see me until you are compelled, and you run away as soon as you can. You must behave differently if you wish to efface the terrible impression you have made."

"I am a goose to mind you," she said; "you are only talking nonsense. I see you are laughing at me."

"I am nearer weeping than you think," said Travers; and, though he laughed, too, there was a curious touch of earnestness in his voice as he pressed her hand tightly. "Good-night, sweetest cos—is it not to be war to the knife between us?"

"Really Cousin Dick was almost in a bad temper to-night," said Alicia, when he had closed the front door.

"Yes, he is a little odd," returned Kate, thoughtfully.

Travers went away townwards, in a curious state of dissatisfaction with Kate, with Carey, with himself. Was it possible that Kate could be taken up with the animal good looks, the commonplace compliments, the surface self-assertion of Tulloch? But women never understand men, or know how to appraise them; and Kate has seen so little of the world. But what a bright spirited creature she was, though variable, now melting in mist, and now breaking in gleams. Like the glimpses a saint has of heaven in his dreams. Yes, Kate had a good deal of heaven about her; and what eyes—not holy eyes, by any means. At all events he had made a fool of himself. Had he suddenly reached second childhood, or gone back to the first that he had so forgotten habit and training, as to let himself speak slightly of Tulloch? He had no patience with such asinine weakness. Rather than risk a repetition of it, he had better accept the proposal made to him a few days ago of colonising and hunting in Africa, a far rarer project then than now. But no. How could

he forsake that weak, kind-hearted, amusing, blundering Carey, who was incapable of taking care of himself, much less his two daughters? He must be there to look after the whole party; quixotic as the aspect of his self-devotion seemed, he could not leave Carey to his own devices. He was so hopelessly improvident, so addicted to unexpected follies, that to leave him, the uncontrolled arbiter of Kate's destiny, was impossible. Yet he was rather powerless to help his Hibernian relatives. How was it that he felt irrevocably linked to their shabby-genteel fortunes? He was really contemptibly weak.

These reflections brought him to the spot on the Bayswater Road where their cab came to grief a few nights before, and his pulses quickened at the memory of Kate's fright, of the strange, sweet reliance with which she had yielded to the clasp of his arms, and leant unresistingly against him. His lips had touched her hair, perhaps. But he was a double distilled ass to let these thoughts crowd upon him. He must be strong enough to resist the temptation of trying to win her when he had no home, no position to offer. It was much better that they should be friends only—that she should even amuse herself with Tulloch than waste her sweet fancy on a poor fellow who could be of no substantial service to her.

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The following Monday evening saw Carey return triumphantly to his temporary domicile. Moreover he carried with him materials for a feast—a small mat

basket containing a slice of salmon, some big beautiful strawberries, and a long round parcel under one arm which, when divested of its twine and brown paper, disclosed a bottle of sparkling Moselle.

"Well, my darlings, it's a poor heart that never rejoices," he said as he unburdened himself. "I thought we must have a bit of a treat, for I declare that queer little fellow, Wincks, has turned up trumps. Dry as he is (and no chip ever was drier) he let me know he was pleased and no mistake with the way I had done my work and then he says: 'As you have proved yourself so useful to the firm I am happy to offer you a further engagement of a year from the present time at double your present salary.' What do you say to that? Faith I'll be a member of the firm before a couple more years are out. Of course he said that after a year they might not have any more Irish business, but that's only the English way of hedging his book. Old Wincks is not the sort of man to lose hold of a clever employee, I can tell you. I hope we have seen our worst days, my darlin's! Now you go and buy your gowns to-morrow; mind you don't spoil the ship for want of a ha'porth of tar." So Carey's triumphant return was inaugurated, and things soon settled down to their ordinary routine.

Several days past and still Jamie Tulloch made no sign, nor did Travers appear at Notting Hill, but he looked in at the office and exchanged a few friendly words with Carey, who had been promoted to a small den overlooking a melancholy yard, which

he generally had to himself, though not strictly "private."

He had written to Alicia, too, and sent the sisters tickets for a private view of some pictures exhibited at one of the big picture dealers.

During the last few months a more intimate acquaintance had developed itself between Miss Golding and her deputy assistant music teacher. She had taken a whim for the quiet ladylike young woman whose help in her practising she found very useful—a sudden fancy for patronising her and her sister—such as rich pampered girls often indulge in. She was a good natured healthy mundane creature, not troubled with sensitiveness or imagination, firmly convinced of the power bestowed by wealth and beauty, both of which she thought she possessed—she had a fair share of good looks, of the "rouge et noir" type, and was a little troubled by a tendency to grow stout. She fancied herself the most generous and warm-hearted of human beings, and was quite unaware of the strong strain of selfishness running through all her thoughts and deeds.

Calling on Miss Carey one afternoon, she was introduced to Kate, to whom she took an immense fancy, which Kate had not very ardently reciprocated. Her refusal, in a very sweet and courteous manner, of sundry invitations, conveyed rather in the style of royal commands, only whetted Miss Golding's appetite for Kate's society, and her usual strong determination to get whatever she wanted urged her on. So one fine afternoon a week after Mr. Carey's return,

she suddenly presented herself at Oakley Villas, double Victoria, champing horses, coachman, footman—all complete.

Both sisters were at home—not a common occurrence—when Miss Golding, gorgeously attired, broke in upon them.

“Well, this is nice. I scarcely hoped to find both of you. Saturday afternoon, I suppose. I have had a horrid disappointment. I was going down to such a smart ‘Saturday to Monday’ party, at the Lorrimers—you know the Lorrimers—the big ship-owner people; they have a sweet place near Ewell, and if one of their horrid children hasn’t developed measles! I had a telegram last night, everyone put off. So I have come for consolation. Go now and dress yourselves in your best. I’ll take you a nice drive round the park, there certainly won’t be many fashionable people to-day, and we’ll eat some ices at Gunter’s, or go into the country round by Finchley, eh?”

“Thank you very much,” said Alicia, quietly.

“Oh! the country would be delightful. You are very kind, Miss Golding,” cried Kate, starting up and beginning to put away her work. (Saturday afternoon was generally given to stitchery of the renovating order.)

“That’s right, I like people that can enjoy themselves. Now don’t be long, dears. My horses get out of temper when they are kept waiting.”

Alicia and Kate went “off” with much rapidity, and Miss Golding walked to the window and sur-

veyed the unmown grass, the tangled shrubs, and untrimmed trees beneath.

"It might be made pretty enough," she thought, "but law! what's the good of capabilities when people have no money to develop them? What's this? Oh, a miniature," opening a faded morocco case which stood on the chiffonier with a few bits of china and other ornaments. "What a pretty woman! The youngest girl is like her! Why, she might be a duchess! Dear, dear, how strange it is that these elegant sort of people never seem able to keep their money! It is an awful price to pay for elegance! Anyhow, nature is kind to some people as well as fortune! This is the papa, I suppose. He's good looking, too! He might be a cavalry man, instead of a miserable solicitor's clerk."

Here her researches and conjectures were interrupted. The door opened and Tulloch walked in. He was as usual well dressed, but his brow was slightly clouded, and eyes troubled. A look of startled astonishment came into the face of each.

"Why, Mr. Tulloch," cried Miss Golding, who was the first to recover, "I had no idea I should meet you here!"

"Nor I, that I should have that pleasure! I was not aware that my cousins had the honour of knowing you."

"Your cousins? Do you mean to say these Carey girls are related to you?"

"Yes," he returned, not too eagerly, "they are cousins on my great-grandmother's side."

"Great-grandmother's side," repeated Miss Golding. "Trust Irish and Scotch people for tracing out distant connections—counting cousins, don't you call it? That is a sort of compound family interest I don't see any good in, for my part."

"I am surprised Kate has not mentioned her acquaintance with you," resumed Tulloch, with a tinge of disapprobation in his tone, as if Kate had concealed something which was greatly to her credit.

"Oh! she is not my friend," returned Miss Golding, "though I like her immensely. She is so bright and amusing. But the eldest is my practising mistress—the sort of thing an accompanist is. Since I have taken to singing she accompanies me."

Dismayed silence fell upon James Tulloch. He was aware that both his cousins worked together to increase the store of family bread, and in the natural and unadulterated condition of his heart and mind he admired and approved their industry. But in the face of the gorgeous, potent, elegant Miss Golding, with her laughing blue eyes and her contempt for poverty and failure, it was—well, not exactly a connection to be proud of. He would have preferred Alicia and Kate having another Victoria—one of their own, standing beside Miss G.'s, in which they might race neck and neck. However, to do him justice, he was too much a man to show the white feather.

"Ah! yes. I knew Alicia did something in music somewhere. I'm glad she works for you. It must be uncommon nice to have such a pupil."

"Many thanks!" ejaculated Miss Golding, with a toss of her head.

"Poor old Carey has come to grief, I am sorry to say; used to be deucedly hospitable to me in my green days, when he drove as smart a turn-out as any in Dublin; saw lots of the best company, too. I wouldn't neglect him on any account now."

"Have they smart turn-outs in Dublin?" she returned with naïve surprise. "No, I am sure, Mr. Tulloch, you wouldn't neglect your poor relations. But are you sure your Cousin Kate's bright eyes have nothing to do with your sound memory and polite attention?"

"Kate's eyes? Oh! no; they are not my sort at all. People of the same complexion rarely take to each other: contrast, strong contrast, is the great attraction."

"Why, you don't mean to say that she has red hair, Mr. Tulloch?"

"Red!" cried Jamie, colouring. "No, of course not; you don't consider——"

"Why, Jamie!" interrupted Kate, coming into the room, "I thought you never intended to come near us again?" She was looking almost her best in a pretty frock of thin grey stuff, and a large hat of black lace and ribbon with a few soft roses outside, and one, with some dark glossy leaves lying on her hair, under the gently upturned brim.

"There is very little of the poor relative about her look or manner," thought Miss Golding. "Tulloch comes pretty often, I fancy."

"Mr. Tulloch is a sort of cousin of ours," continued Kate, with a faint tinge of patronage in her tone, as if introducing him.

"Oh! we know each other," said Miss Golding; "we have met once or twice."

"So sorry, Jamie, that we cannot keep you to tea, but Miss Golding is so good as to take us out driving, and that is what we don't get every day!"

Here Alicia joined them, also dressed in her best (her best was generally black), and greeted Tulloch cordially.

"Come!" cried Miss Golding, "come along with us, Mr. Tulloch, and help to keep us going."

"Many thanks! Very sorry I can't, but I only ran out to inquire if Mr. Carey had returned. Couldn't have stayed, I assure you: I dine with Travers to-day."

"Well, don't let us waste time. It is a lovely evening. Can't I set you down anywhere: we are going straight away over Hampstead to Finchley. Good-bye!—*au revoir!*" and Jamie Tulloch was left to his own reflections.

CHAPTER XI.

A VISIT FROM WINCKS.

THE next day was peculiarly fine and clear, with a delicious, balmy atmosphere, and as night drew in, a nearly full moon and a galaxy of stars in the deep blue vault of heaven touched even commonplace objects with beauty.

Kate had gone to evening service, leaving Alicia to keep her father company. Miss Wincks also attended the same church, and had given the sisters her gracious permission to occupy two seats in her pew. They usually occupied them in the evening, for when Carey accompanied his daughters in the morning they preferred being all together, and contented themselves with the lowliness of the free seats.

Though his sister was a most regular attendant, Mr. Wincks rarely accompanied her, and then only in the morning on high festivals. On the present occasion, Kate was a good deal surprised to find her patron already ensconced, looking dryer and grimmer than ever, with a dash of discomfort suggestive of an unaccustomed frock coat, and a not altogether congenial employment.

He moved a little to make room for Kate, and handed her a hymn-book. Kate thanked him with

a bend of the head, and the sort of kindly, confidential smile he was used to from her, and which always gave him a pleasant sense of the intimacy and mutual understanding which had grown up between these strangely assorted friends.

As they left the church, and Kate found herself passing through the door side by side with Mr. Wincks and his sister, a daring thought suggested itself to her. "What a lovely night," she exclaimed. "Dear Miss Wincks, we live just half-way between your house and this. Suppose you stop and rest for a few minutes at Oakley Villas? My father would be so pleased to see you!"

"Thank you, Miss Carey," with the sort of stiff reluctance which always characterised her manner. "But I don't think my brother ever pays visits."

"Perhaps not," urged Kate, persuasively. "But this would be only a friendly call, not a formal visit, and you would give us so much pleasure."

"It is a remarkably fine night," remarked Mr. Wincks, looking up in a questioning manner. "I don't mind if I do look in on your father. I suppose he will be at home."

"I am almost sure he will—as sure as one can be of anything," returned Kate. "I am so glad you will come."

Miss Wincks looked surprised—not agreeably surprised—and the trio walked on, only speaking at intervals, for somehow, though Kate found her thoughts shape themselves into words readily enough when alone with her kind, if somewhat crotchety patron,

the presence of his sister had a curious effect of difficulty and suppression.

The few remarks made were only uttered by Kate to Mr. Wincks, Miss Wincks preserving strict and apparently disapproving silence.

When they reached Oakley Villas they found that Mr. Carey and Alicia were strolling in the moonlit garden, and the sitting-room gas not yet alight. Mr. Carey was soon summoned, and came in "smiling," charmed to play the host in his own castle to the potent Wincks.

"This is a real pleasure, my dear sir," he cried, shaking the little man's hand cordially. "At the office I feel I must not intrude personal matters on graver affairs; but here, as it were in private life, I must thank you, and I do so from my heart, faith! for your goodness to my Katey! She has been twice the girl she was, before you gave her the chance of making a trifle for herself, and when I say herself I mean myself. For all she cares for is to serve me. Yes, that's all, my darlin'. So don't open your lips to contradict me," and he laughed a happy contented laugh as he shook his hand at Kate, who was lighting the gas. Here Alicia entered and joined in the conversation.

Carey put on his best and most courtly manner to entertain Miss Wincks, who unbent much more to him than she did to his daughter. His kindly blue eyes beamed upon her with genuine joy as he offered her tea or a taste—just the least taste—of real Irish whisky, which he brought over from the old country

himself, with a dash of water and a lump of ice—as pleasant and wholesome a drink as one could have. No? “Well, maybe Mr. Wincks might like a little, for the night was warm,” etc.

Then he held forth on her brother’s kindness and great business abilities, and glided into a description of the difficulties arising in his native country from the extreme bigotry and ignorance of the priests—a theme which he soon perceived interested his hearer, for Miss Wincks was a profound Protestant of the Evangelical type.

Mr. Wincks meanwhile permitted himself to be entertained by the young ladies, and though they felt it was a tremendous undertaking they made a gallant and successful effort.

“I was looking at the illustrations in that beautiful new book of yours, Mr. Wincks,” said Kate, struck by a happy thought; “I mean the one about Celtic and Greek crosses. I should like to show you a picture we have of our family burial place; it is by a very clever friend of my father’s,” and she produced a sketch of the church and graveyard of Clonmacnoise, with its cross and round tower, one of the few treasures preserved from the old home.

Mr. Wincks was much interested, and listened attentively to Kate’s explanations. Then in his turn he gave some account of the various theories by which the learned and the fanciful sought to account for the curious structures peculiar to the Emerald Isle.

Kate looked and was fascinated. Wincks felt she was; she made no effort to express the pleasure his

discourse gave her; but it was clearly perceptible to the speaker, so he talked on till the catalogue of Romish errors and misdoings began to pall upon the mental palate of Miss Wincks, and she rose to take her leave.

"I am much flattered by your kindness in calling on my girls, my dear madam; and to you, Mr. Wincks, for this mark of friendliness," said Carey, escorting his guests to the door. "I only hope, once you have found your way to our rooms, you will come again."

"Thank you; I shall be very happy," said Miss Wincks, graciously.

"If you think that new work on crosses would interest you, you are welcome to take it next week. I don't say take care of it, for I see you value them," was Mr. Wincks' valediction.

"I don't think those people live as economically as they might," said Miss Wincks, reflectively, as the brother and sister paced steadily homewards.

"How do you make that out?" asked Wincks.

"Do you mean to say you did not observe the antimacassars over the back of those old lodging-house chairs? They must have cost eighteenpence to two shillings, and can't be washed, for they are worked with gold and silver. Then that water jug and the goblets! They never were bought by a landlady. Nor is it very prudent to keep whisky at hand; it is a common, low——"

"Mr. Carey's youngest daughter is an unusually intelligent young woman," broke in Mr. Wincks, as if he had not heard her speak. "She is interested in

topics that—that I—never thought I should broach to a young person; and though Carey is a curious mixture of shrewdness and folly, he has managed to attract a wonderful degree of devotion from his daughters,” and the little man sighed unconsciously. “Yes, he is a strange sort of man; more likely to serve another wisely and faithfully than himself.”

“He is very nice and polite,” returned Miss Wincks, who was always pleased when her brother “thought” aloud to her, his nearest approach to confidence—“and his religious principles seemed sound—still I would not trust an agreeable Irishman too much.” But Wincks did not seem to hear her. On his side Carey was much gratified. He came back from opening the garden-gate for his guests rubbing his hands. “I never thought my worthy principal would pay me a visit, I daresay he thought it a condescension. Faith, his sister is a sensible, agreeable woman. She wouldn’t have a bad figure if she hadn’t swallowed a couple of pokers in her early youth and never digested them!”

“Well, papa, I don’t know how Miss Wincks made herself agreeable, except by listening.”

“And a very good way, too, my jewel. I’d a good deal rather be listened to than strive to listen. It’s easier for both parties, too, by Jove.”

“I don’t care for Miss Wincks,” said Alicia, lighting her bed-room candle, “and I don’t think she likes us.”

“Perhaps not, but she tries to like us, and should be encouraged,” said Kate.

"I wonder how it would do to ask Wincks to a bit of dinner? by all accounts he lives chiefly on chops. I'd like to give him a treat for once," observed her father, not hearing her last observation.

"Oh, no," exclaimed Alicia. "It would be too tiresome."

"I don't think it would do," said Kate, thoughtfully. "Probably Mr. Wincks never dined out in his life!"

"God help him!" ejaculated Carey, compassionately.

Tulloch's project of dining on the previous day with Travers was nipped in the bud. A telegram awaited his return to his rooms, informing him that Travers had been called away on important business, and would not return to town till the following Wednesday. Tulloch used some bad language, and departed to seek his repast at a restaurant, not having joined any club as yet.

A week elapsed before they met, during which interval Tulloch went a good deal into society, and found his days well filled by increasing business. In short his natural tendency to consider himself a man of importance was developing largely. It was a pleasant sensation, yet the cause of some mental conflict also.

He was torn between a very strong fancy for Kate Carey, and an equally strong desire to improve his position by a wealthy marriage, which he began to think he might have for the asking. Still Tulloch was an ardent admirer of beauty and responsive to

the charm of manner. His satisfaction was therefore not without alloy.

Early in the ensuing week he had a line from Travers—

“Just come back. Are you free to-morrow? And shall we have our deferred dinner? eight sharp, wire ‘yes’ or ‘no.’”

It was with mixed feelings that Tulloch accepted the invitation. He had an odd kind of growing resentment and dislike towards Travers. When they had met in India Tulloch—then the hard-working junior in a respectable, but by no means a great commercial firm—though it lent dignity to his social position to be on friendly terms with so well-known a sportsman and member of the “upper ten” as Travers. Since his reverse of fortune, and Tulloch’s rapid advance, the latter’s soul burned within him with pride at the contrast between the present and the past. In a way he had felt kindly and compassionate towards Travers, for Tulloch was not without feeling, and could be generous in the sense of giving money on occasions: but it riled him not to be able to look down from the height of his advancing prosperity on his friend as an unfortunate fellow. Somehow there was an undefinable superiority about Travers, which Tulloch instinctively felt he could never touch—a certain high-bred quiet tone of absolute self-reliance that would be the same to king or cobbler, and perfectly polite to both—a sense of being behind the scenes, in circles which as yet were unexplored by Jamie; as yet only—for in this “*fin de siècle*” all

things are possible to success—nor is there a social holy of holies, impenetrable to an accumulator of the dross that makes the world go round. Still, though Travers had “come down” considerably, and was little more than an upper servant to Lord Balmuir, by Jove, Jamie Tulloch was pleased to say he had been dining with him—“a sort of connection of mine, and he was saying,” etc.—there would follow some bit of political gossip or forecast. Their mutual friendship with Carey and his daughters was another source of irritation, though the rivalry was not prompted by any special regard for Kate; as far as he was concerned, Jamie thought Travers was nowhere. But there was a general sympathy between him and the trio—a confidence and similarity that Tulloch perceived, though he could hardly define, notwithstanding the very kind welcome always bestowed upon himself.

Travers saw that there was something on Tulloch’s mind as dinner proceeded. He was rather cynical in his remarks, and laughed louder and oftener than was necessary. When they reached their dessert and needed no more waiting, conversation naturally became more confidential.

“Another glass of claret, Tulloch,” said Travers, pushing the bottle towards him; “it’s not bad. Were you mature enough when you used to visit Carey in the old days to appreciate his claret? I always liked good things, and I don’t think I have ever tasted any wine that surpassed it. Poor old boy!—and how liberal he was with it.”

"If he had been less liberal with it and many other things it would have been better, and he'd have given his friends less trouble," growled Tulloch.

"Come! He has not given much to either of us, nor cost anyone much except his daughters, and they are unconscious victims."

"Why you know they are always consulting you and sending for you."

"If I don't mind why need anyone else? And if it bores you to go out to Notting Hill, Tulloch, why, don't go; I daresay they'll forgive you."

"Oh! you think so," with a self-sufficient grin.

"Have you seen Carey since he returned? I hear that he has won golden opinions from Wincks and Co."

"No, I haven't," said Tulloch, "but I called on Saturday—the Saturday after he came home—and I was a good deal annoyed and put out."

"Indeed! Was Kate captious? she is sometimes."

"No, nothing of that sort. But when I went in there was no one in the room but a lady I was very much surprised to see there—a deuced pretty girl I can tell you, who has lucre as well as looks: Miss Golding."

"Ah! I know!" ejaculated Travers.

"Well, I said I didn't expect to see her there, and she said she was amazed to meet me. We had gone down to dinner together at Sir Peter Ingot's, and talked half the evening at Mrs. Tremlet's reception, and I fancy she rather took to me; and, never thinking how they came to know each other, I said,

‘Oh! I’m a cousin, a sort of cousin of the Miss Careys.’ ‘No! are you?’ said she, with a little scream. ‘Why, Miss Carey is my assistant music mistress.’ Not very nice for me. I can tell you I was taken aback.”

“Why?” asked Travers, quietly.

“Why, man! you don’t mean to say that you cannot see the disadvantage of having poor relations in the eyes of a girl who has been brought up in the lap of luxury, and surrounded by solid wealthy people all her days? Of course, she will think less of me.”

“Very likely. Has she struck you off her visiting list yet?”

“I never know whether you are in earnest or not, Travers, but I can tell you I am just at a turning point in my career, and it’s a very serious matter the choice of a wife: the sooner I make it the better, hey?”

“No doubt, and where are you disposed to throw the handkerchief?”

“Well, Travers, I have been going out a good bit to dinners, and dances, and receptions, and in a very good, solid set, though I say it. It’s wonderful what a lot of nice-looking young women I have met, all well off, able to bring a fair amount of capital into the partnership. Now, that’s a great help, and I don’t think a man is justified in throwing away his chances, however weak he may be about a pretty face and an elegant figure.”

“That depends on the man, and what he considers most essential.”

“Now,” resumed Tulloch, “I confess I was aw-

fully annoyed with those girls—the Careys, I mean—for keeping me in the dark about what they were doing, and letting me in for that disagreeable encounter with Miss Golding.”

“Keeping you in the dark!” repeated Travers, with a touch of scorn in his tone. “What do you mean? Were you not perfectly aware that Alicia gives music lessons, and that Kate wears out her pretty fingers writing for old Wincks? That was nothing new to you. You have no right to complain because they did not submit a list of their employers’ names to you.”

“No, no, of course not, still it was awkward. They’re good girls, very good. I’m sure I admire and commend them, but still one can’t expect a girl like Miss Golding to take that view exactly, and it was unpleasant. Decidedly unpleasant. Yes, thank you, I’ll take another glass.”

“No doubt you found the encounter trying,” put in Travers.

Tulloch, however, required no incentive to talk. He had taken a good deal of wine, and was full of his subject.

“You see, I am a good bit troubled and perplexed. I am greatly struck with Kate Carey.”

Travers had looked round, and observed that the dining-room was rather empty, while their table was in a corner remote from the other diners. He, therefore, encouraged his guest by observing, in a sympathetic key:

“Yes, I have noticed it.”

"Eh, man!" continued Jamie, warming to his subject, "there aren't many like her. What eyes she has! How they melt and sparkle, and her golden-red brown hair, and bonnie sweet mouth! Eh, I'm like to make a fool of myself about her, and then she is a bit fond of me! Aha, lad! I don't think I'm wrong, and she's good right through; but Travers, though I would love her well, it wouldn't only be marrying her, but the father and the sister, and I'm not sure I've a right to take such a burden on my shoulder. After, you see, man? After, when the fire was quenched a bit, I might be sorry—that would be unjust to her."

"I'd immensely enjoy wringing his neck," thought Travers, looking steadily at him. "He's a big fellow, but I think I could do it."

"It is a very serious consideration," he said aloud, in a soft, thoughtful way, "and I think if I were you I would back out in good time."

"You are right—that you are—but it's hard—deuced hard. Now look here, there's that infernal Crystal Palace business?"

"I shouldn't trouble about that if I were you. You can get out of it easily enough. I'll take the trio."

"No, no, no," energetically, "I'll not go back of my word. Let us settle all about it, and after I'll be more prudent."

The details of this long-promised excursion were soon arranged, the following Saturday being fixed as most convenient for everyone. The general half-

holiday, though less general then than now, making that day the usual *fête* with all classes.

They were rising from table when a man who had been dining by himself came across the room, and saying, "Mr. Travers, I think?" offered his hand. He was a broad, thick-set man, dark and rugged-looking, with a pair of stern, resolute eyes. Travers shook hands with him cordially.

"Very sorry to have missed you when you called. I have been out of town for nearly a week," he said.

"If you'll fix any time when you can see me I'll call again. We all want you to consider your refusal to join us. Believe me, you are throwing away a good thing—a thing that would suit you exactly. You're just the lieutenant I want, and there's money in the concern."

"I have no doubt of it, but——"

"Let me have a talk with you. Dine with me to-morrow."

"To-morrow I am engaged."

"The next day, then, eight o'clock, Morley's Hotel."

"Thank you, I shall be very happy," returned Travers.

"Who is that?" asked Tulloch, as they went out into the hall, and took their hats and coats from the attendant.

"Captain Garston. He is the leader of an exploring party that the African Mining Company, a concern started by Finlay, the brewer, is sending out to the wilds behind the Portuguese settlements on the

East Coast. They want me to join them. No doubt it may turn out a very good thing for those who venture first, or it may not. It is a sort of thing I should like well enough, and I am sick of town life."

"Why don't you go?" cried Tulloch, with some eagerness. "You might make a lump of money, instead of plodding on at a beggarly salary. Why don't you go?"

"Oh, I hardly know. In some ways it would not answer."

"Well, you know your own affairs best. We'll be sure to meet between this and Saturday. So, good-night."

CHAPTER XII.

A GHOST FROM THE PAST.

AT the period of this story, the Crystal Palace was considered rather an appropriate scene for elegant festivities, and distinguished members of the "upper ten" gave luxurious dinner parties there, and strolled about the grounds or gazed at the wide-spread landscape, or the gorgeous fireworks from the broad balconies. Its glories are gone, but they were quite satisfactory while they lasted, and not only Kate, but even Alicia, who took things much more coldly, was elated at the prospect of a day among the beauties and curiosities of the gardens and wonders of Sydenham Hill.

"Shall you want me especially to-morrow, Mr. Wincks?" asked Kate, who was busy pasting a collection of newspaper cuttings, accumulated during a long period by her employer, in a book.

Mr. Wincks had been obliged to keep away from business on account of a slight indisposition, an attack of faintness, at which the doctor looked grave, and counselled complete repose. Wincks sat very quietly in his easiest chair, and directed her operations languidly.

"I expect a gentleman on business to-morrow

morning," he returned, "but I should be glad to see you in the afternoon. I don't feel equal to much."

"At the same time," said Kate, as he paused, "you are going to disobey orders, and see a gentleman on business. Now, if Miss Wincks did such a thing you would scold her."

Wincks smiled rather a feeble smile.

"The business will be short and simple," he said, "and I shall know no rest until it is accomplished. But do you want a holiday to-morrow? Why?"

"Yes, I do, for a cousin of ours is going to take us all to the Crystal Palace, and I should like to go very much."

"I hope you are not growing fond of pleasure?"

"No, Mr. Wincks, I am not growing fond of pleasure. I never could be fonder of it than I have always been."

"Still you have been diligent, and never asked me for a holiday before."

"My work has been intermittent, you know, and if I could not work diligently for you, for whom could I?"

Wincks did not reply, but a softer look stole over his wrinkled face.

"Very well," he said, after a pause. "There is no necessity for your coming here to-morrow, and on Monday I hope to be at the office."

"Thank you. I hope you will be able to go out, but, Mr. Wincks, I like coming to work here very much. Could you not have your letters sent up and dictate your replies to me? I can write quite a good

business hand now, and—but I fear I take a liberty by speaking so fully.” A sweet blush stole over her cheek and she looked deprecatingly at him, and a soothing warmth stole into the little man’s half-starved heart as he felt, with a conviction he could neither reason about nor resist, that this bright, fair young creature heartily liked him, and, if necessary, would nurse him as tenderly, as carefully, as if he were her father. Wincks was very weak to-day, and could not resist these foolish sort of feelings, though he was properly ashamed of them.

“No, you mean no freedom,” he returned, drily. “You might be more careful of your speech, not with me, but with others—strangers.”

“And do you think I speak to everyone as I speak to you?” she said, indignantly.

“That I cannot tell. However, you can go to the Crystal Palace if you like, only, do not spend much of your own money.”

“Oh, dear me, no. We would never dream of going had we not been invited, even though we are much better off now, since you were so very good as to help us to help ourselves. Thank you so much. I will come round on Sunday to see how you are, and if you want me on Monday. Do you like the Crystal Palace, Mr. Wincks?”

“I have never seen it.”

“Never?” echoed Kate, much astonished. “Nor Miss Wincks? Oh, you really ought to go! The gardens, the fountains, the view—all are lovely!”

"It is too late to learn such joys," said Wincks, somewhat grimly yet with a slight smile.

"Oh, no, I hope not. I do hope not," cried Kate. "Perhaps Miss Wincks will come again some evening, and you, too, to see us. It will be a fortnight on Sunday since you came."

"It is rather late for me to begin paying calls. Now please write the heading of the next page. These cuttings all relate to the workings of an orphanage I am interested in, though I am sorry to see it has been a good deal mismanaged lately." Here the conversation ended.

The long anticipated Saturday was soft and balmy, but somewhat uncertain in its aspect, with many scattered clouds veiling the heavens.

Mr. Carey, moreover, prophesied that it would clear up and turn out a "hissing hot" afternoon. "Just the thing for the Palace."

They found their escort waiting for them at Victoria, and Travers observed there was very little increase of prudence or diminution of ardour in Tulloch's attention to his attractive kinswoman—notwithstanding the prudent views entertained by him when she was out of his sight. It was excusable, Travers thought, for Kate had never looked more charming—there was a soft joyousness in her eyes and voice, a sparkle in her pleasant natural talk, which made his heart ache with the knowledge that he must not attempt to win so bright, so precious a "jewel," as her father justly termed her. However, Travers practised the prudence Tulloch talked about, and

bestowed his conversation and his care on the elder sister.

On the whole, it was a pleasant day. They roamed about chiefly in the gardens, though the courts were also visited.

"It is nonsense attempting to keep together," said Tulloch, early in the afternoon. "Let us fix a meeting place for six-thirty, as we'll have plenty of time then to dine before securing places to see the fireworks."

"I fancy it would be more lively not to separate," exclaimed Kate. "But if we do drift apart let us meet near that screen at the east end, with all the kings and queens on it."

Travers highly approved of her suggestion, but was rather puzzled by the decided flirtation which Kate not only permitted but encouraged. Could she really like this rather animal relative, who was undeniably a handsome man, and had the merit (always great in a woman's eyes) of being her warm admirer. Travers did not like the way things were drifting, and did his best to avoid separation. But Tulloch, who represented the centripetal force on this occasion, managed to circumvent him—till meeting in the Pompeian Court, where Travers was doing showman to Alicia, as he had frequently visited the original, he exclaimed: "Come, Kate, I shall not submit to be cut in this fashion. Why, I haven't seen you for ten days."

Tulloch never could quite stand up against Travers when he was in earnest, so in another minute Kate

found herself walking beside her kinsman towards the wide southern balcony.

"You are very tyrannical, Cousin Dick," she said, with a sweet upward glance.

"I deny that. I am not inclined to be done out of my rights, and Tulloch must be content to come second; excuse my audacity, but I am your first love." Kate laughed merrily, dropped her parasol and stooped to pick it up.

"Certainly you are our first friend, our best friend, dear Dick," she added, in a lower tone.

"Don't be grateful, Kate. That is too trying," returned Travers, and something in his tone brought the warm blood to her cheek. "Come, let us sit here and enjoy the view. It is almost the best thing about this big show," and he found a couple of chairs which he drew to the front of the balcony, where they sat for a few minutes in silence.

"How much beauty there is in these grey days," said Kate at last. "Brilliant sunshine is vulgar compared to this tender neutral colouring."

"Yes. But I am afraid it betokens a wet evening. We have a cruelly uncertain climate."

"I suppose the uncertainty seems especially unpleasant to you after your frequent sojourn in sunny lands."

"Well, it is, though I must confess that—

" 'In climes full of sunshine, though splendid their dyes,
But faint are the odours the flowers shed about;
'Tis the mist and the cloud of our own weeping skies
That draw their full spirit of fragrancy out.' "

"I am glad you read Moore. He is sweet," she murmured.

"Sweet, but not strong," said Travers. "He is full of the delightful femininity of your race, which makes your women irresistible—but your men——"

"Don't say disagreeable things about them, Dick! I do not want to quarrel. It is a sort of day that ought to be sacred to friendship, with its soft subdued tint. I suppose you begin to weary of the shadows and the sameness, for Jamie Tulloch tells me you are thinking of this exploring expedition to Africa!"

"Tulloch must be at a loss for conversation to trouble you with such vague reports. I have been asked to join an expedition, certainly, as I mentioned, but have refused."

"Yet I am sure you do not like London?"

"I get sick of it, but I return to it with a sort of zest. At present, however, I am going to stay here."

"I suppose Lord Balmuir cannot part with you!"

"He might survive the parting, but I stay for reasons of my own."

"Though you are so fond of adventure and sport and wandering in wild places? I always notice, Dick, that if you drift into talk about your past exploits there is more life and earnestness in your voice than when you are speaking of other things. You must be sick of sitting at a desk nearly all day after the freedom you have been accustomed to."

"If that was all my trouble, I should endure it well enough," said Travers, as if to himself.

"We all have our troubles which nobody knows anything about," returned Kate; "and we must bear with them until they wear themselves out. I suppose most of them fade away in time." She sighed as she spoke, and gazed dreamily away over the rich country spread out like a map before them.

"I wish life was brighter for you, my dear cousin!" he said, stealing a glance at her face. "For a creature gifted with so keen a sense of enjoyment—such an appreciative taste for pleasure—the routine of your existence must be dreary enough."

"I do not think it is. Don't you remember, Dick, that some historian in his account of the woeful retreat from Moscow mentions that the troops which bore the cruel cold and hardships best were the Southern Italians who had been steeped in sunshine all their lives. I enjoy so much, when I have a little enjoyment, that the glow lasts me for quite a long spell of outside dreariness, and gives me strength."

"Ah, Kate, I suspect that the light which surrounds you, the warmth which invigorates you, is all from within, from the central fire of your own great heart, my sweet cousin," and Travers looked into her eyes with an expression which was a caress.

"No fine speeches, Dick," she exclaimed, laughing, but blushing also. "We are too friendly, too sincere for such compliments."

"I never am guilty of paying you compliments, Kate, as you well know." He paused an instant, and went on, "So you manage to pick up some crumbs of comfort, some blossoms of pleasure on the dusty road

of everyday life. The joy of flirting with Tulloch, for instance. By the way, what are you going to do with that ingenuous youth?"

"Why, Dick, he is very little younger than you are."

"Oh, yes, he is younger in hope and achievement, but I repeat are you bamboozling him or——" He looked straight at her as he paused.

"I am amusing myself," said Kate, with much composure.

"Are you not afraid that what is play to you may be death to him?"

"Not a bit!" she exclaimed, with a delicious smile, half sweet, half mocking. "Jamie Tulloch will take a great deal of killing, and I, who have so little to amuse me, may contrive a good deal of harmless fun in the process."

"And perhaps heal the excellent Caledonian's wounds finally?"

"All things are possible," returned Kate, demurely.

"Possibly you might do worse. Jamie is on the high road to wealth."

"A consideration to which I am by no means indifferent," she said, with a thoughtful air.

"Few women are!" exclaimed Travers, feeling uncomfortably surprised.

"Or men either, and small wonder. Is there anything worse than want of money, real downright want of money?"

"Yes, it is pretty bad. Then love in a cottage,

a struggle for life with the man of your heart, will not be your line?"

"Of course not!" with a gay laugh. "Have I not had enough of poverty and pinching? And you see, Dick, I could only marry a very, very rich man—a man who could afford to marry us all! What a rare bird he would be!—a man who was equally rich and generous. Do you think all the gold in Ophir—all the gems in Golconda—all the love of which his nature is capable would enrich Jamie Tulloch enough to undertake the maintenance of two people who are practically of no use to him?"

"It is impossible to say. His nature may blossom out under a fructifying shower of gold."

"'Possibly,' as you say, Dick, when you utterly disbelieve something. After all, Jamie Tulloch is very good looking and not ill-natured. Indeed, he has an air of great kindness sometimes. I shall deal gently with Jamie. It must be six o'clock, Dick."

Travers looked at his watch. "Five minutes to six," he said; "come along—come and smother your favoured kinsman with sweets."

"Am I not sweet to you, too, Dick?"

"Yes; deucedly sweet!" returned Travers with a grim look. "I did not know that you had grown in worldly wisdom as well as grace, Kate. I am not sure that I quite understand you, but I am pretty sure you will not reveal yourself if it is not your good pleasure." They rose and strolled eastward to keep their "tryst."

The rain prophesied by Travers began as the

little party sat down to dinner. The table was set in a window which commanded a fine view, but this became gradually enveloped in the dull leaden mist of small thick enduring rain, which increased in density as evening closed in.

The dinner, however, was gay and festive. For the moment Tulloch seemed to have cast the cold counsels of prudence to the winds; Carey was always at his best on such occasions. Travers, too, seemed determined to enjoy himself, while Kate's gay recklessness of speech and sentiment, and her sister's quiet appreciation of the others' pleasantries completed the ingredients of an unusually agreeable party.

As the rain continued to come down with increased heaviness they agreed to give up the idea of staying for the fireworks, and got away before the rush for town began. Travers proposed that they should all take tea in his rooms, which was agreed to readily, and they set forth by the underground passage to the high-level station.

A train had just started as they reached the platform, and there was no other for half an hour, so they strolled up and down, read the advertisements, and looked at the books and papers on the bookstall after the usual fashion of unfortunates who have missed their train. Carey, his eldest daughter, and Travers were laughing over some caricatures in "Ally Sloper," while Kate and Tulloch walked to and fro somewhat silently.

"Have you noticed that lady in black who is

sitting at the end of the platform, huddled up in a despairing way?" asked Kate, suddenly.

"No!" said Tulloch; then looking closer as they passed the motionless figure, he added, "I don't think she is a lady; she is some old servant out of place."

"Well, I think she is a lady," insisted Kate. "Her clothes look rusty, but she has a refined look. Clothes alone don't constitute a gentlewoman, Jamie, though you may not have learned the fact in India. Somehow, that lady does not seem a stranger to me: I do not like to stare at her too much. Alsie, dear," stopping beside her sister, "I want to know if you recognise that lady in black sitting under the board with third-class written on it. Come with me."

The two girls passed her again, and for the first time the woman in black raised her head, and looked at them with dull despairing eyes. Then Tulloch and Travers, to their great surprise, saw Kate run to her and take her hand in both her own, and even kiss her sallow cheek. After a moment's hesitation Alicia also greeted her. They could not hear Kate's exclamation, "Madame La Rose! It must be dear Madame La Rose! Don't you remember Kate Carey?—Katey, your naughty pupil—long ago in Dublin?"

A look of pleased recognition lit up the dull dark eyes and faded face.

"*Mon Dieu!* Can this be little Kate, and Alicia? What has brought you here, to this cruel town, my children?"

"I may say misfortune," returned Kate. "I must call papa; he will be so pleased to see you."

"I doubt that!" said Madame La Rose. "I am too unfortunate to be welcome to anyone."

"That is no fault in papa's eyes," said Alicia, with her kind quiet smile.

"I know! I know how good he has ever been," cried the poor Frenchwoman. "Ah! my evil fortune has been too much for me."

Here Mr. Carey, with Kate on his arm, came up radiant, charmed to have an opportunity of doing some small kindness to an old acquaintance and *protégé*. His bow was elegant and chivalrously deferential.

"This is indeed a great and unexpected pleasure. I thought you had returned to your own beautiful country. I hope you are staying for a while in London that we may have the pleasure of renewing our old friendship."

Madame La Rose did not reply; her heart was too full for utterance, and she strove silently to gain composure. "I did return to France," she said at length, "and then unfortunately left it. I have a sad story to tell, but I need not trouble you with it now at any rate; my immediate misfortune is that on reaching the station more than an hour ago to return to town, I found a large number of persons waiting; the train came in at the same time, and I could not in the rush for places succeed in finding one. I am weak, having been ill. When the train was gone, putting my handkerchief back in my pocket,

I missed my purse; some pickpocket had taken it. My ticket was in it, and all my money." With the last word her voice broke, and it was evident she had sustained a great disaster.

"Oh, never mind," cried Carey, beaming upon her. "Faith, that can be soon remedied. You shall come back with us, and I'll see you to your place myself."

"Oh, no, monsieur. That would be too much. I live far away—near the High Street, St. John's Wood."

"Never mind, I'll see you home for old acquaintance sake; and we'll settle some day when you can spend it with the girls. You would not know Kate, I'll go bail; she has grown up a fine slip of a girl."

"Her sweet face came back to me as soon as she spoke."

"Here's our train; take my arm, madame. It's like a bit of the pleasant times come back to me, to see you again."

Madame La Rose was very white and tremulous, as Carey handed her carefully into a first-class carriage. "But the ticket," she murmured.

"Don't trouble yourself," he returned. "I can pay the ticket collector when he comes—better than mounting those high stairs."

Kate told Tulloch and Travers, between whom she sat, in a low tone, that Madame La Rose had been her governess when Mrs. Carey died, and for some years after; that she had been most helpful and quite like one of the family. She had been re-

called to France by the death of a relative, and they had lost sight of her.

"I hope your father will not let himself in for anything," remarked Tulloch, taking advantage of the fact that Madame La Rose was herself speaking to Alicia.

"What do you mean?" asked Kate, opening her big eyes.

"Old ladies of that sort are apt to lose their purses sometimes," returned Tulloch with a grin, and a knowing look at Travers, who did not respond.

"Oh, you mean she is pretending she lost it?" returned Kate, with an unmistakable ring of scorn in her tone, and she turned to speak to Travers, soon growing silent, till after some minutes she asked Alicia to change seats with her, as she wanted to talk to Madame La Rose. An angry frown darkened Tulloch's brow. Kate's quiet contempt made him savage. Travers watched his young cousin's speaking face, feeling he could read in it what she was saying to the weary worn woman beside her.

Arrived at Victoria, Carey committed his daughters to the care of their cavaliers.

"Come, madame," he said, "though I have fallen on hard times I have not only one but a dozen carriages waiting down below. We'll take the underground to St. John's Wood, and you'll guide me after. I'll come straight back to your diggin's, Travers, and take these troublesome girls home. Come, madame, allow me," and he presented his arm in courtly fashion. An amused smile spread itself over Travers'

dark face as he looked after them, while they walked away towards the Metropolitan station.

"What a *preux chevalier* your father is, Kate."

"Yes! Isn't he sweet?" she returned.

"Let us charter a couple of hansoms," added Travers to Tulloch. Signing to one as he spoke he handed Kate in and drove away to his lodgings, with a keen sense of pleasure at having obliterated Tulloch for the moment.

The couple of hours which ensued were pleasant enough. Travers' landlady was assiduous in her attentions to the young ladies, whom she knew as her tenant's relatives and favoured guests, and soon set forth tea with delightful brown bread and butter, in Travers' comfortable, picturesque sitting-room, the decorations of which afforded ample food for conversation. Kate was gracious to Tulloch, and chaffed him about his suspicious disposition, and threw him into some confusion by repeating the flattering enquiries made respecting him by Miss Golding, who appeared to be cultivating an intimacy with the sisters. Finally, Carey joined them. He was rather grave, and imbibed a couple of cups of tea almost in silence. Then the fire within him burned, and he spake with his tongue.

"I've asked our good friend, Madame La Rose, to spend to-morrow with us, girls. Faith, her sad story made my heart ache! She inherited a bit of money from a relative, and set up a high-class school down on the south coast somewhere, taking a friend into partnership. The friend was to find

some cash, but never succeeded in the search. They struggled on some years, then the friend married and went off, set up a school and took away some pupils, and then misfortunes came thick. Madame closed the school to avoid bankruptcy, saving a mere trifle from the wreck, came to London to look for an engagement as governess, fell ill with rheumatic fever, which ran away with the little cash she had, and now she's on the rocks, must leave the miserable place she is in, a back room up three pair of stairs, to-morrow, and—I say, Alsie, my darling, don't you think she could get that bit of a dressing-room next yours for a trifle? Mrs. Salter would be glad to get five shillings a week rather than let it lie idle."

"I can ask her," said Alsie.

"Why, Mr. Carey, you're not going to take in a penniless, broken-down creature of that kind!" cried Tulloch, aghast. "She may be taken ill or God knows what. You can't tell what you are letting yourself in for."

"It is a very natural, kindly impulse," said Travers, gently. "But you must not lose sight of prudence in the exercise of your benevolence."

"Prudence, my dear boy. That's just it. I'm acting with the height of prudence. Sure I could not leave an old valued friend to total shipwreck for want of a trifle of help when I'm just getting out of the wood myself. No, faith, that would be having neither reason nor decency. And could I help her on a more limited liability system? The trifle of food she'll consume is not worth talking about. She'll

pay her rent, of course, and she'll soon find work. Why, sir, she's a woman of elegant manners and first-rate education. She is fit to bring up a princess, by gad; and as to knowledge of the world, she might run neck and neck with yourself, Travers. Begad, her society will be a great advantage to the girls, and she'll soon find work when Alsie here has introduced her to Miss Golding, and others like her, whom a good Providence has supplied with money and ignorance to employ and pay the unfortunate well instructed gentry who can't keep their heads above water. No, so far from being imprudent it's my belief that I have done a right good stroke of business this night," concluded Carey, in a triumphant tone.

Tulloch fidgeted on his chair and made some inarticulate exclamation between an oath and a growl. Then he started up. "You'll excuse me," he said to the company generally, "but I have just remembered I promised to call on a friend from Edinburgh who is staying at the Royal Hotel in Blackfriars Road, and I shouldn't like to disappoint him. Good-night, Mr. Carey; good-night, Kate. See you to-morrow or next day, Travers." And he was gone.

Travers laughed. "Poor Tulloch!" he said. "You tried him too severely, Mr. Carey. Such a wild proposition was more than he could stand."

"What is it to him?" asked Kate.

"What, indeed," echoed Alicia.

"Come along, it's all hours!" exclaimed her father. "Travers, my boy, a thousand thanks for a

delightful day, also to Jamie Tulloch. Tell him from me. He's a quare creature. When will you be coming up our way? To-morrow? No. Never mind; come when you can. Always glad to see you."

"Are you?" said Travers, in a low tone, as his eyes sought Kate's, and found their answer there.

His guests gone, Travers threw himself into an arm-chair, and gave himself up to thought. He had several invitations for that evening, but none that compelled his presence.

"No, I shall not want anything more," he said to his ex-servant, and present landlord, who presented himself as soon as the table was cleared. "I shall soon turn in. Good-night." He lit a cigar, and began to muse over the day. It had not been all pleasure—in fact, it had had many disagreeable moments, but a few sweet ones also. "I am an awful fool—an unmitigated ass," was his sentence on himself. "After all these years of quiet comfort and common sense, to lose my head—ay, and that indefinite thing, my heart, about a young creature who was not born till I had nearly attained manhood! It's positively despicable! Is it, though? Is it a delusion of the love fever, or a reality, that there's something irresistible about Kate? To me at all events she is attractive both to sense and intellect. Intensely human, with a dash of nobility; not easy to win, I fancy; but if she once gave herself she would give utterly. It is positively pathetic to see how she lives and works for her father—ready to brave anything and everything for those she loves, without

counting the cost. What an infernally cruel turn of destiny to rob me of powder and shot before I had a chance of bringing down so grand a quarry! But have I? Perhaps—only perhaps. Kate is no mere timid blushing girl, ready to crouch and come to heel at a few tender complimentary words. Her keen sense of humour forbids that. She is splendidly brave, too, yet a delicious coward. Would she have lain so confidingly still against Tulloch had he been her escort that night when the cab broke down? I feel the throb of her heart still. No, she has never idealised Jamie. She knows him through and through. Did she mean to warn me of her readiness to barter herself in order to provide for her father's old age when we talked on the balcony to-day? I believe her sound judgment would forbid that sort of insane devotion. But if she did, she would pay the price, to the uttermost farthing. What is best for me and for them—for Kate—am I strong enough to see her often, and let neither tongue nor eyes betray what I feel, or hamper our friendship with the desperate tangle of passion? I hope so—and would the pleasure counterbalance the pain?"

"It is hard to say!" He rose and took two letters from a drawer of his bureau. One was a business-looking epistle, on bluish paper; the other bore an elaborate monogram on its thick "cream-laid note."

He read over the first, and laid it down. It was from the organiser of the exploring expedition before mentioned.

"It is a good offer," mused Travers, "but will it lead to independence—to something of a decent home, even though in the wilds of an infant colony? Would it be best to venture in order to have? and leave poor Carey to take care of himself and the girls, or hold on to London, and be a sort of guardian, though a poor one, to these shorn sheep? Carey has done better than I hoped, but I can see that his position with Wincks is very precarious. I must wait. I need not decide immediately." He folded the letter lengthways, ready to be placed in the "To be answered" *paquet*, and slowly tore up the envelope. Then he read the other. It was very brief.

"Dear Dick,—I only arrived this morning. Come and lunch with me to-morrow. All news when we meet. Are you going to Gertrude's "moonlight garden party?" I only hope the moon will be so obliging as to shine.

Yours always,
"FRANCES HUME."

This bore the address "Long's Hotel."

While Travers mused on "love and money," Kate lay very still, though wide-awake, on her little white bed, watching the luminous darkness of a summer's night, and living the past day over again. It was too bad to have been obliged to give so much of it to Jamie Tulloch, when she might have had so many opportunities of delightful *tête-à-tête* talk with Dick. She never could talk so easily, or, she fancied, so

well to anyone as to Dick. "Jamie is not bad though, and I must be nice to him. Anything—anything to blind Dick. He must never know that I love him, and even if he felt inclined to love me, which is not likely, it would only make him miserable. No, he must be ambitious. Man ought to be ambitious, and marry a rich woman, as Jamie says he could if he liked. Good-night, dear Dick, and good-bye. God bless you!" If a few tears moistened her pillow, why, "the mask of night was on her face," and the nature within her had all the weakness of its strength.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN INTERLUDE.

To take a friend, even an old friend, into the intimacy of everyday life, to share one's roof, and the unavoidable revelations of existence in common, is a bold and frequently a disastrous attempt. Irish and French natures, however, are favourable to such an experiment, being sympathetic and gregarious. Kate, who had occasional gleams of common sense, in spite of her impulsiveness, and Alicia, in whom the same light shone more steadily, were both conscious that in asking their old governess to share their narrow home Mr. Carey had committed an imprudence. Yet they were pleased to receive her, and really glad that "Papa" had thrown discretion to the winds.

It was like old times to have Madame La Rose with them again; to hear her well-remembered voice, her exceedingly French pronunciation of her fairly fluent English; she brought back the bright, and also the sad, days of their more prosperous time, and at once fell into the routine of their quiet lives with a full and grateful heart.

As she had paid up her rent when she gave

warning a week before, she was able to leave her rooms next day and remove to Oakley Villas.

What pen could describe the trembling gratitude, the overpowering sense of relief which almost unnerved her as she found herself installed as a favoured guest with her old pupils and their kindly, generous father. Once more she had a breathing space, a chance of finding employment. She had gone down to Norwood to ratify an engagement which she considered certain, and on which she expected to enter immediately, when, to her dismay, she found the lady who had engaged her had been summoned back to India by her husband, and she had decided on leaving her children at school.

Then came the loss of her purse containing her all, and leaving her with ten shillings in a corner of her workbox to carry her on through the long, doubtful search for pupils.

Now, for the moment, she again hoped, and her weary heart revived. Alicia and Kate were quite busy making her tiny room as comfortable as their means would allow, and gave her a warm welcome on her arrival. Then they sat down and talked immensely over that delightful incentive to conversation, a cup of tea. Madame La Rose was profoundly grieved to hear of her good friends' reverses, of which she had gathered but a faint idea from Mr. Carey's account, and realised how generous and self-forgetful was the hospitality offered to herself. The hand which held her cup trembled as she eagerly consulted the girls respecting her chances of finding work.

Alicia was encouraging. The school in which she gave music lessons had not long been opened, and was on a small scale, too small to accommodate more than one governess in addition to the mistress and scholars. This put the owner in some difficulty as to teachers and obliged her to engage outsiders. Thus Alicia found an opening, and this suggested to her that Madame La Rose might be acceptable also, as she had heard a rumour that the present French teacher was looking out for a resident position.

Madame La Rose caught at the idea, and they discussed the question fully.

Then their new inmate hastened to make herself useful. She had the genius for needlework, the indefatigable industry of her countrywomen. She confiscated (temporarily) all the unmended garments in the little commonwealth and put them in sound working order. She rummaged all the bits of good old lace held in abeyance in the uppermost ends of drawers and boxes by both girls for want of time to wash and sort them, and performed miracles of mending and clear starching. Above all she managed to conclude an honourable and durable peace with Mrs. Salter, the landlady, by which she acquired the "freedom of the kitchen" and permission to cook "dainty dishes" and instruct its mistress to do likewise. Then she played backgammon and picquet with the head of the family unweariedly, and even managed an accompaniment to Kate's ballads, and made the sisters try duets.

"Can't you come up to dinner on Saturday?"

said Mr. Carey to Tulloch, whom he encountered near the Bank about a week after their excursion to the Crystal Palace. "It's a month of Sundays since we saw either you or Travers. We have an uncommon agreeable French lady staying with us. You remember her—the same that had her pocket picked. We have joined forces for a bit. I'll promise you one or two good dishes, begad. Madame is a regular 'Cordon bleu,' if you know what that is. The girls were wondering what had become of you. Hope you are not engaged to any Croesus of your acquaintance, Jamie, my boy! Come and let us have a pleasant evening; if you will take sound pale ale instead of shaky champagne, for it's not everyone knows the real thing."

Tulloch hesitated, and then said he would be very happy.

"All right! Sharp seven. I must not loiter. I'm just up to my neck in work. Poor Wincks is no great things—hasn't the strength of a fly! And I see he wants me more and more. In fact, I am his right hand man."

"Hope he won't die," ejaculated Tulloch. "It would be a blue look out for you, I suspect."

"And why should it? I am pretty essential to the firm, I can tell you."

"Well, I hope so," returned Tulloch, and they parted.

"I hate croakers," said Carey to himself, as he made his way down Moorgate Street. "Men think

themselves so mighty wise when they prophesy misfortune! Sure I've had enough to last a lifetime."

Wincks had been ailing since the hot weather set in, and though he stuck to his office work he did not seem equal to giving Kate any directions about hers, though he occasionally asked her to stay and read aloud when she called to inquire for him or to return books which she had borrowed. He sometimes asked Mr. Carey to call of an evening, and planned the morrow's business in the cool quiet of his own parlour.

Miss Wincks, too, about this time became entangled in the clerical mesh of the rector's scheme for a bazaar in aid of his schools, and Alicia, Kate, and Madame went diligently to work to supply her stall, so the friendly relations between employer and employed were intensified.

This, however, is anticipating.

Of Travers they had heard little. Only one letter asking if they would like to go to the Haymarket, to see the last performance of the most popular actor of that season, before his departure for America.

To this Kate made Alicia reply declining the offer, on the plea of work to be done at home.

"Why won't you go, Kate?" asked her sister. "You love the theatre so much."

"Oh! well—because I won't," said Kate, and Alicia asked no more.

Jamie Tulloch was a little late, and looked rather

serious, though he cheered up at the cordial greeting of his host when he came to dinner.

"This is a relative of mine," said Carey, with a graceful and gracious wave of his hand. "Mr. Tulloch, my respected friend, Madame La Rose. Mr. Tulloch has resided in India for a considerable time, and seen a great deal of life at home and abroad, so I have no doubt you'll have much in common."

Tulloch, in spite of himself, felt considerably impressed. Could it be possible that this ladylike looking woman in black silk, with a pretty old-fashioned lace fichu, and her abundant grey hair elegantly piled on the top of her head, could be the bowed, despairing figure in shabby garments who had excited his suspicions a week ago? He little guessed the range of years through which almost religious care had preserved Madame's best black silk.

"And where is Miss Kate?" asked Tulloch, glancing round with a sudden fear that he should be defrauded of her society.

"She will be here directly, she has only just come in. Miss Golding wanted her to choose some things for her party next week, so they went early; but Kate stayed to lunch, and spent the afternoon also."

Tulloch was not particularly pleased by this speech. He did not like the intimacy which was growing up between Miss Golding and his cousin; they might even compare notes, which would never do. While he halted between two attractions, and hesitated to which he should throw the handkerchief

—while he thought, Madame La Rose was speaking. “Mademoiselle will be ready soon; she asked if Mr. Tulloch had arrived directly she entered.” Here the door opened to admit the missing member, who smiled brilliantly on Tulloch, and gave him a message from Miss Golding.

“When she heard you were to dine with us, Jamie, she said be sure you tell him to come early on the 30th; he might help me in many ways.”

“Then they have been chattering about me,” he thought, while he observed aloud, “I’m sure I shall be very happy to be of any use to her.”

“No doubt,” returned Kate, with an arch glance, which sent a thrill of pride and pleasure through his veins. “She’s jealous; be hanged if she isn’t,” was his self-flattering conclusion.

Here dinner appeared, and they sat down in high good humour, Carey helping Madame first with the most polite attention, and drawing attention to the excellence of the “sole au gratin,” “which is only a plaice after all, though you would never know.”

“It’s uncommon good,” said Tulloch, who was by no means superior to the pleasures of the table, and he gazed with increased respect at Madame La Rose as the “author of this good thing.”

His mood was a little mixed. The present was delightful and gratifying to his self-love; but the future—that must not be lost sight of. There was much lively talk during the repast, and by the time strawberries and cream were put on the table the

little party had settled down into a pleasant degree of familiarity.

"I am sorry you are not going to Miss Golding's ball," said Tulloch, who took it for granted there was no admission for such humble peris as Alicia and Kate through the golden gates of the Westbourne Terrace Paradise. "I'd like to have a dance with you. I dare say you would make a famous partner."

"No doubt I should," returned Kate, with a little nod and smile. "But I told Miss Golding Alsie and I never went to parties. It was no use attempting them. She was very nice and kind, and was evidently disposed to offer us ball dresses on the spot. But I have brought her into training. She does not attempt to offer presents now."

"No, faith! Kindness and civility as much as you like, and hearty thanks for them, but we don't want any crumbs from the tables of rich people," said Carey. "Eh, my darlin's? Any way, Miss Golding seems a brick, and she is a pretty girl into the bargain. Begad, good looks and good fortune together is too much luck. I suppose nothing short of a peer of the realm will do for her."

"Whoever may be her husband, I earnestly hope she may find a really good one. She is a kind, warm-hearted girl as ever lived," exclaimed Alicia.

Now Tulloch pondered these speeches, while Madame La Rose was saying:

"It is always well to have an evening toilette. One may lose much by staying at home. I think with that Indian muslin of yours, some ribbon, and

a little foliage, a charming 'costume de bal' might be arranged. Let us plan it to-morrow," said Madame La Rose.

"Willingly," cried Kate. "You are wonderful, dear Madame."

"Seen Travers lately?" asked Tulloch, helping himself to the cream.

"Haven't had a glimpse of him since our grand day at the Palace," returned Carey.

"I had a note asking us to go to the theatre. But we could not manage it," said Kate.

"He is a great chap for the theatres," resumed Tulloch. "I went to the Opera on Wednesday with Mrs. McClaren, of Bombay, and her daughter, who are over here just now, and doing the shows, and I saw Travers with a grand swell lady in the stage-box. Some young fellows who came to speak to Mrs. McClaren said she was the Honourable Mrs. Douglas Hume. Anyhow they seemed very thick, looking round the house with their glasses, and laughing together as if the whole world was a source of fun. I'm told she is a rich widow, so maybe Travers is on the road to fortune. She is a fine, handsome woman, nearer forty than thirty, I fancy. They went away together."

"A rich handsome widow!" cried Kate, with a bright glance at the speaker. "If she is good, too, I hope she will marry Cousin Dick. He deserves to be happy, and I am sure he will make a nice pleasant husband."

"That is high praise," said Madame La Rose;

"a pleasant husband is even more rare than a good one."

"I don't know about the goodness," returned Tulloch, looking keenly at Kate. "She is not exactly in the set that goes in for goodness. Her sister, Miss Golding tells me, is the Marchioness of Lanesborough, who is rather fast. The Marquis's horse won the Derby last year: she is going to give an out-of-the-way sort of garden party next week, I believe. I fancy Miss Golding would like to go. Anyhow, with three or four thousand a year a man has no right to expect an angel into the bargain."

"I do not see why he should not," said Kate. "If I had a hundred thousand a year and married a man without a penny, if he were kind and loving I should be as ready to do everything for him and be as dutiful to him as if the money were his; in fact, the money would not enter into the question at all, only I would rather never marry if I could put no capital into the concern," she added, laughing.

"Why, Katey dear, you are a fortune in yourself," cried her father. "Your health, my jewel!" and he raised a glass of very thin claret to his lips.

"That's true!" said Tulloch, gallantly. "At the same time she is right enough: every thoughtful girl would like to be a help to her husband. It is a little hard on a man when everything comes out of one purse."

"Yes, if the purse be small," remarked Alicia. "Otherwise it must be joy to a man who can afford

it to give all possible luxury to the woman he loves."

"To be sure it is, one of the greatest pleasures in his life," exclaimed Mr. Carey. "But when a couple love each other it does not matter two straws which has the cash."

"Mr. Tulloch does not take the same view of the subject," said Madame La Rose, with a knowing smile. "He is on the side of the majority, and no doubt thinks a little gilding improves everything."

"I am as disinterested as my neighbours," retorted Tulloch, who was not in a particularly good temper, "and you have no right to think otherwise, Madame."

"But that is exactly what I do think," she replied, sweetly.

"I believe Miss Golding's ball is to be a grand affair," said Alicia, the peacemaker, to change the subject.

"Yes, first rate; she is to have that Indian Maharajah, who has been the lion this season, and dining everywhere from Marlborough House to the Fishmongers' Hall, and General Sir Peregrine Chutney, with a lot of other bigwigs. The flowers will cost a lot, I believe."

"Quite a small fortune," cried Kate. "I was with Miss Golding at the florists to-day, and enjoyed seeing all the lovely creations. I suppose the Maharajah will wear all his jewels?"

"Yes, of course."

"I should like to see them."

"Then why will you not go?"

"I am not tempted; even the jewels are not a sufficient bait."

"Le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle," murmured Madame La Rose, an ordinary expression, which raised the ire of Jamie, who, not understanding French, believed it masked some insult, unspeakable in English.

"You're right," exclaimed Carey, who often surprised his companions by unexpected agreement with their opinions. He hated to seem deaf, and knew that dissension was dangerous. He gathered that Madame and Jamie were opposed to each other, though none of the argument being addressed to him, the sense escaped him. "You never said a truer word. Have a little more claret, Madame? That I should ever apply such a title to a mere commoner like this vinegary stuff." Madame declined, and then the bell was rung and the table cleared, while Kate devoted herself to a similar process on Tulloch's temper, not without success.

There was a strong strain of mischief in Kate Carey, and for some reason it amused her to play upon the notes of Jamie's emotional keyboard. She smiled upon him, and chaffed him about Miss Golding, and sang Scotch airs to him, and generally fooled him to the top of his bent; while Alicia looked on in somewhat grave surprise, and Madame La Rose threw in little remarks from time to time, every one

of which, though most innocent, were offensive and irritating to Tulloch, till he sought ignominious safety in flight, retiring to the solitude of his own abode, to fight a distressing battle between prudence and passion, over more than one tumbler of whisky and water, before mental weariness drove him to bed.

"I really don't quite understand you, Kate," said Alicia, seriously, as they prepared for the night, which was their confidential time.

"I daresay you do not, Alicia. I don't understand myself."

"Do you care for Jamie Tulloch?"

"Dear Alsie," drawing herself up, and speaking demurely, though there was a gleam of fun in her eyes. "I hope I am too well brought up a young lady to care for any man who does not care for me. In short, it is too bold, too audacious for a down-trodden woman to take the initiative in such a game. Of course, if a well to do and rising individual like Jamie chooses to condescend to a maiden of low degree like myself, I hope I am prepared to show a proper amount of gratitude. But oh, I am so tired—tired of everything. Let us go to bed. I am going to see dear Mr. Wincks to-morrow afternoon; I quite enjoy a talk with him. After papa, I believe he is the dearest man I know, and he tries to be extra hard with me, and all the time I am sure he would give a great deal to have me for a daughter. That poor soul has been only half alive all these years,

and he has a heart, though he is rather ashamed of such a weak spot."

Alicia lay awake a little longer, almost envying her sister the rapidity with which sleep folded its balmy wings over her tired eyelids, little dreaming how long, and with how much sad courage, Kate contemplated the future which confronted her, before her waking stillness was merged into oblivion.

CHAPTER XIV.

"PARTING IS SUCH SWEET SORROW."

The Sabbath evening had nearly faded into the first night watch, and Carey was talking of retiring to rest.

"I have a busy day before me to-morrow," he said, "and I must be ready for it. Faith, last week was an idle one. Wincks wasn't much at the office, and it's rather curious that no one but him seems to meddle with the Irish business, so I've not much to do if he is away. It's rather slack, too, but that's not to be wondered at, and we just at the beginning of the Long Vacation."

Her father's words gave Kate a little pang of uneasiness. Was the need for his services at the office real and lasting, or merely temporary?

"Mr. Wincks said he was going to business to-morrow, and hoped to find you there," she said.

"Yes, to be sure he will, for——"

The opening door interrupted him, and Travers came in, to the surprise of everyone.

"The sight of you is good for sore eyes!" exclaimed Carey, joyously, stretching out his hand without rising, while both the girls came forward to greet the new-comer.

"Couldn't manage to come before. Indeed, I was almost afraid it was too late to call, but I thought you would forgive me, especially as it will be some days before I can find half an hour for my own purposes."

"You shall have plenary absolution," said Kate, with a smile and look of joy, of which she was unconscious, lighting her wonderful dark grey eyes, and the colour mounting slowly in her cheek.

It was so delightful to hear his voice again, to meet his responsive glance, to feel, as she always did, though she could not explain it, that they understood each other in a way no one else had an idea of. Of course, she must let him go. It was all weakness and folly, but to-night she would be happy. She would live in the present moment, and forget everything. To-morrow she would take up her cross, and walk steadily under her bitter burden.

Meantime Travers was talking with pleasant courtesy with Madame La Rose, and Kate observed that her old friend was evidently attracted by the easy, well-bred man of the world. They spoke of France, which Travers knew well, and the poor, depressed gentlewoman cheered up at his appreciative observations on her beloved country. After some general and desultory conversation, Travers remarked, "I have just come up from Richmond, where I have been spending the day—at least since luncheon—and sharing a discussion on the forth-coming garden party Lady Lanesborough is to give on Saturday next."

"Indeed!" said Alicia; "yesterday Jamie Tulloch was here, and he was full of assisting at an entertainment Miss Golding gives this week. It is curious that both our special 'young men' should have been similarly occupied."

"They'll never do it younger," said Carey, when this had been repeated to him by Kate. He was very sleepy, and half regretted the appearance of his favourite, Travers.

"I believe Lady Lanesborough's party is to be something quite unique," continued Kate.

"Yes, it will either be one of the most charming *fêtes* ever given, or a dismal failure, according as the moon and the weather behave," said Travers.

"I suppose you are going?"

"I am; I know Lady Lanesborough slightly; but her sister, Mrs. Hume, is an old friend of mine: the late Hume and I were great chums, though he was a good deal my senior. Mrs. Hume has been away for a long time, and only returned to town last week. I was dining with her yesterday, and in the course of conversation I mentioned that I had a couple of young relatives in London who would enjoy her fairy-like scenes, etc.; so after some talk she offered to take one of you young ladies to the garden party. Are either of you disposed to accept the proposal?"

"I think you must have been very persuasive, Dick," said Alicia.

"No; I assure you Mrs. Hume is a good sort of woman, and fond of young ladies," an explanation

which reduced to a phrase the long confidential conversation between the two friends, in the course of which Mrs. Hume gave her ally much good advice, and divined his secret wishes.

"I am sure Kate would enjoy such a festivity immensely."

"So would Alsie," returned Kate; "which of us are you going to ask? For, of course, the choice is with you."

"Oh, I could not choose," said Travers, with a smile that screened his anxiety as to the decision; "you must make the selection yourselves."

"That is quickly done," said Alicia. "It is just the sort of thing Kate would enjoy to the full, and I don't care for such gaieties, to say nothing of the risk of sore throats."

To this Kate demurred, and a kindly contention was carried on for some minutes. Alicia was firm, however, and Kate found that everyone was determined she should be the guest of the evening. It took all Travers' self-control to hide his joy at this conclusion. Then there was a pause, during which Kate almost heard her heart beat. It was broken by Madame La Rose, who put a leading question.

"And the toilettes, dear Mr. Travers. It cannot be possible that the ladies will go into a garden '*décolletées*.' "

"Oh, no; I heard Mrs. Hume and her sister discussing that matter. It is to be morning, that is, afternoon dress. You know it is not to be a big gathering, a few choice spirits—though the affair has

got talked about more than Lady Lanesborough likes. A pretty simple summer costume is all that is required."

"Precisely!" said Madame La Rose. "I understand. Your Indian muslin, dear child, over green—'*vert tendre*'—some shaded green ribbons and a white lace hat with green and gold beetles, and a butterfly resting in your hair where the brim of the hat is bent upwards. I see it all!"

"So do I!" exclaimed Travers, laughing. "You will be quite dazzling, Kate."

"It is true, green is the colour to wear with such a tint," said Madame.

"Don't laugh at me," implored Kate, blushing vividly. "I know, however, that if anyone can work wonders it is Madame La Rose."

"Begad, you'll do her credit, and my darlin' Alsie will keep the old father company," cried Carey. "She must have the next treat when anything turns up."

"Alsie is always too ready to give up to me," exclaimed Kate. "I feel I am a selfish wretch."

"The question has been decided for you. By the way, will you not call on Mrs. Hume? It would be pleasant to make her acquaintance before this 'corobery.' What day would suit you, and I will arrange a meeting."

"I am free every day just now. Mr. Wincks has not given me anything to do for some time."

"Very well, you shall hear from me. Now I will not keep you from your slumbers any longer. By the way, Kate, in case unkind skies should oblige us to

keep indoors, there is a band in attendance so that those so disposed may dance."

"How delightful! Dear Dick, can you waltz?"

"Can I waltz! what an insult. I am 'first chop' on the light fantastic toe."

"Really?" she returned with some incredulity. Travers laughed, said good-night, and was gone.

The whole face of affairs seemed changed to Kate when she woke the next day.

True, it was a dazzling prospect, this delightful party, but—there was a woeful "but"—and somehow the night before Travers was so sympathetic, so plainly anxious, to her perception, that she should go to the *fête*, that she seemed to forget the relations which probably existed between him and Mrs. Hume. She did not heed Tulloch's communication much when he mentioned the probability that Travers was going to marry this rich widow; now it seemed a certainty to her. It was no doubt to please her *fiancé* that she was so ready to chaperon an obscure and insignificant girl, and whatever the charms of the coming festivity it had its skeleton. How should she bear to see Dick bestowing the attentions due to his future wife on a woman fairer, richer, more suited to him far than herself? She must learn to do so. She would! She would school herself and not be weak and unworthy. Nor did Kate seek consolation in a mean belief that Dick was marrying for money only, while he preferred herself. He had a kind, even a tender interest in

her, but she had been absurd, conceited, idiotic. Dick would love and think only of the woman he married, and she must hide her pitiable folly so closely that it would die out for want of light and air. "Then I shall be myself again and quite happy," thought Kate, whereupon she burst into a flood of tears embittered by shame. Still she was too full of vitality to allow this tide of distress to sweep the picture of possible enjoyment at the anticipated party from her imagination. "No, come what may, I will enjoy this," she thought, "though it will be the entrance to a dark passage enough. There is many a sorrowful day to come after, but life cannot be all gloom. It would be impossible if it were, and light will come some time or other." Then it must be confessed some comfort came to Kate in the fancy sketch presented by imagination of the costume depicted by Madame La Rose. Green suited her well, she knew that; but where was the silk underskirt to come from? That was quite beyond Kate's resources. Suddenly came a vision of some dainty green brocaded stuff which she had seen among the "things new and old" which lay with other treasures in Madame's capacious trunk. No doubt this fine thing was to be offered up on the shrine of Madame's favourite pupil. Finally sleep stole gently over Kate's weary eyes, while she mentally apostrophised Madame as "a dear old thing."

The next day Alicia returned from her music lessons at the school in high content. Mrs. Mancton, the head of the establishment, had requested Madame

La Rose to call upon her, as Mademoiselle, the present French governess, was so disobeying and disagreeable as to want to go away before the actual termination of her engagement, and Mrs. Mancton was anxious to show her independence and get rid of her at once.

"And I am sure, dear Madame, once you begin to teach in her school she will never like to let you go."

"No; she would be a fool if she did," exclaimed Carey, who had just come in a little late for dinner. "I shouldn't be surprised if she took you into partnership, if we could see our way to raise a trifle of money just to grease the wheels and enable you to roll easily into the position. It's not every day Mrs. What's-her-name gets such a chance."

"Dear sir, the sunshine of your noble heart gilds all things," cried Madame, smiling, while her eyes moistened. "At any rate, it is an opening, and this petulance on the part of Mademoiselle has been lucky."

The interview which followed was successful, and Madame's mornings were henceforth employed. The sense of being no longer alone, the belief that her luck had turned, gave her fresh strength and added new vigour to her excellent intelligence. Meanwhile her afternoons were devoted to the magnificent work she had undertaken for Kate.

The last post that evening brought a note addressed to Miss Carey.

"It is for you, Kate," said her sister, when she

had opened and glanced at it. Kate took it eagerly. Having mastered the contents, she cried, "How very kind! It is from Mrs. Hume," and proceeded to read, "Dear Miss Carey,—Will you come to luncheon with me to-morrow at one-thirty, and settle about our expedition on Saturday next? Your kinsman, Mr. Travers, tells me that I may address you '*sans cérémonie*,' so excuse the abrupt style of this hasty note. I am overwhelmed with business, etc. I will send the carriage for you at one to-morrow, and hoping you may be disengaged, remain yours truly, Frances Hume."

"That is all Dick's doing," said Alicia, with a pleased smile, rejoicing with her usual unselfishness at the prospect of a day's pleasure for Kate.

But Kate looked a little grave; she rather dreaded the proposed interview; she hoped she would do credit to Dick's recommendation. Mrs. Hume was, no doubt, a great lady—a class of which Kate had seen but few—and she was eager to go.

"I do hope that Mr. Wincks will not send for me to-morrow, at least not till evening. It is so long since he has given me anything to do in the mornings that it is quite possible that he might want me to-morrow."

"Ay, faith, it would be just like the general 'cussedness' of things," ejaculated Carey.

But for once the "law of cussedness" failed, and Kate, having attired herself with care to the best of her ability, was quite ready. When the "gurl" with some awe in her tones announced that the carriage

had come for Miss Kate, she was alone, both Alicia and Madame having gone out on their several businesses.

The drive to the Longs, where Mrs. Hume was staying, seemed interminable to the young "*débutante*," as she considered herself, and when she arrived and mounted the long stairs to Mrs. Hume's private sitting-room her heart was beating fast.

As the waiter who preceded her was about to lay his hand on a door a tall, military-looking man with keen brown eagle eyes, abundant dark hair, and moustaches, powdered with grey, and a distinguished air, came out. He cast a sharp glance at Kate, and drew back with a slight bow to let her pass. The next moment she was in the presence of Mrs. Douglas Hume, and was wondering why she had half-dreaded the meeting.

She saw a woman about her own height, inclined to embonpoint, brunette, with abundant hair, sleepy dark eyes, and brilliant smile, showing beautiful white, regular, strong teeth. Her face, her expression radiated happiness, and intense satisfaction with life. Kate never forgot that sunny look.

"Very glad to see you, Miss Carey!" she said, kindly, in a rich, soft voice, which yet sounded as if accustomed to obedience, and holding out a slight brown, fair hand, sparkling with rings of value. "Dick Travers said you would forgive the abruptness of my advances. He seems to be very busy. I have just had a telegram from him to say he cannot join us at luncheon, as I hoped he would, so we

must make each other's acquaintance without his assistance."

"It is very good of you to ask me," said Kate, blushing, and feeling that though her hostess was handsome and attractive, she was older than she expected to find her. "I am greatly obliged to Cousin Dick."

"So am I," returned Mrs. Hume with frank courtesy; "but Dick has been doing people good turns all his life!"

"He has done us so many that I could not count them!" said Kate.

"I daresay he has."

Kate felt that Mrs. Hume was scanning her critically, and fervently prayed she might bear inspection. It was the last time she ever dreaded those handsome observant eyes.

"Luncheon is ready," said the waiter, opening a door which led into a small dining-room.

"Come, then, my dear Miss Carey, I am very ready for luncheon. I was late last night, and early this morning. I am wildly busy, as I leave London for a considerable time the week after next. What's this?" to the waiter.

"Sweet breads *à la Tomate*, Madame."

"Oh, very nice. Let me give you some. And so we are going together to my sister's garden-party on Saturday. It will be very pretty if only we have not a deluge of rain."

"I have to thank you very heartily for taking me," said Kate.

"No, no. I like fresh young things. Though I am by no means *blasé* myself. And what do you think of wearing? I ask," she went on quickly, "because I want to regulate my own costume. You know when French women agree to drive together in the 'Bois' they always arrange their toilettes, so that no murderous contrast of colours may occur."

"No, I never heard that before. It is very wise," and Kate detailed briefly the dress planned for her by her old friend.

"Very nice. That sounds very pretty. Then I shall wear black lace over lilac, and we shall not clash. I rather fancy you are on the way to Richmond, and I can call for you. But Dick Travers will plan all that. We both have profound confidence in Dick!"

"I am sure I have!" exclaimed Kate.

Mrs. Hume looked at her thoughtfully, while she said to herself, "I begin to understand. It will be a bad business for both. I really thought he was a seasoned vessel, but I fear he is making an idiot of himself. Poor souls! I feel wonderfully indulgent!" Then she resumed the conversation, and made herself very charming to Kate, discussed their plans for Saturday, and told some amusing anecdotes respecting dramatic and literary celebrities. At length she exclaimed, with a glance at the "Pendule":

"My dear Miss Carey, I am going to be brutally frank. I have a hundred and one things to do this afternoon, and must go out. Can I set you down anywhere?"

"If you are going near the Marble Arch," began Kate.

"Yes, of course. I am going to Park Lane."

This interview had a curious effect upon Kate. She felt the charm of Mrs. Hume's presence and manner profoundly. Yes, she was a woman worthy of Dick, and in every way suited to be his companion. They would be happy together, and she herself would be strong and of a good courage. When Travers was absolutely married that would complete her cure. Meantime she must look her best on the important occasion of appearing in public with Mrs. Hume, and do Dick credit.

Mr. Wincks required her services almost every evening during that week of anticipation. Yet when she presented herself at Paragon Place there was seldom much for her to do. Chiefly she read aloud and assisted her friendly employer to select choice morsels from his pile of newspaper cuttings. He complained a good deal of faintness, of an aching about the region of the heart, and some difficulty in breathing. But her mornings were her own, and she worked diligently under Madame's direction to complete the finery requisite for the coming Saturday.

The only communication with Travers was a note, in which he informed Kate that Mrs. Hume would call for her about seven-thirty on Saturday, and that he would himself be their escort. This would perhaps be a painful pleasure, thought his young correspondent, but she was going to be strong and sensible.

Saturday morning was rather sultry and dull, but at noon there was a heavy shower, accompanied by distant thunder. Then the clouds dispersed, and the sun shone out, to the joy of the trio at Oakley Villas, who had watched the weather with much anxiety.

Needless to say that Kate was ready before the time appointed, thus allowing ample time to her sister and Madame La Rose for criticism and admiration.

"You are such a dear Madame," cried Kate, as she stood before the glass, "to give me this lovely green silk, or rather to lend it for——"

"Chut, my sweet one," interrupted Madame. "I should only have had it dyed. I wear no longer colours; you shall give me one hundred guineas for it when you get a big, big fortune."

"When I do, you shall have it, and welcome," said Kate, laughing and blushing with pleasure at the reflection of her own image in the glass. She did not think she could have looked so well, and she was profoundly thankful for this crowning mercy.

A few minutes after the time appointed a carriage drove up, and the next moment Travers came in. There was an indescribable look of animation and joy in his eyes—an alertness about his figure and carriage that conveyed, to Kate at least, the idea that he was immensely pleased about something.

"Ah, Madame La Rose, my best felicitations on the result of your creations. Kate's costume is a thing of beauty, and the general result delightful. Now, Mademoiselle, we must not keep Mrs. Hume waiting."

It was a pleasant drive. The air was fresh, the sunset over Barnes' Common very fine. Travers and Mrs. Hume did most of the talking. What a host of memories they seemed to have in common; what a crowd of mutual acquaintances. These people had really lived, and had apparently skimmed the cream of life. What was she, Kate thought, with her rudimentary knowledge and limited experience, that she should for a moment dream of satisfying the mind, the fancy of such a man as Dick Travers? His kindness, his sympathy were merely the outcome of his generous compassion.

The grounds of Lady Lanesborough's beautiful villa were sufficiently filled with people to be cheerful without being crowded, and every creature there seemed to know Mrs. Hume. Kate felt peculiarly strange, but not forlorn, for Travers kept steadily beside her, and she felt in some indescribable way that it pleased him to give her his arm, and display her as his kinswoman.

There was a military band, and some glee singers. But the chief charm of the entertainment was that everyone knew everyone else.

For a while Kate was greatly interested in gazing at the various famous and well-known people pointed out to her by Travers. What a new world it was, what a red letter day in her life, and what a great gulf yawned between her existence and that of her companion.

"Who is that neat, elegant little man, with such smiling dark eyes, and white, white teeth?" she

asked. "He bowed to you a little while ago, and we have met him several times since."

"Oh, that man. He is considered rather irresistible, I believe—Bertie St. Ledger. He is first *attaché* at St. Petersburg, and home on leave. They say he is the best judge of beauty and grace, and all that sort of thing in Europe, and isn't a bad fellow, though a bit of a fribble."

"I fancy he wonders what country cousin you are conducting. He looked at me with a sort of surprised air."

"Ah! Have you captivated the critical Bertie, my dear cousin? That would be a triumph. Here he is again, by George."

Kate laughed. "I am quite willing to do my 'endayvour,' as they say at home, towards his subjugation," she returned.

"How do, Travers," said the *attaché*, strolling up.

Travers replied, and after exchanging a few sentences, St. Ledger suddenly stopped to pick up Kate's fan, which had slipped from her lap to the grass. They were sitting on a bench under a wide spreading beech, which commanded a delightful peep of the river and the wooded bank opposite.

"Really, Travers, you wild hunters of the hills and prairies are not fit to be trusted with the care of a lady," he exclaimed in a slow, sweet voice, smiling at Kate as he spoke, and offering the fan with a bow.

"Yes, I am afraid I am a boor, but my cousin is an angel of forgiveness," returned Travers.

"No, I cannot believe that. I fondly believe her to be incapable of being an angel."

"Kate, let me present my friend, Mr. St. Ledger," said Travers, smiling. St. Ledger performed a beautiful bow.

"May I ask if you have had tea or coffee or ice, or any of the great variety under which the tables in there groan? No? Why, this is terrible. I must rescue you from this savage kinsman of yours—a well-meaning savage, I grant—there is a look of hunger in your eyes."

He offered his arm as he spoke.

"Then my eyes do not speak the truth," said Kate, looking at Travers for some hint what to do.

"Go on, then, I'll follow," he said, good-humouredly. So Kate took St. Ledger's arm, and they strolled in the direction of the refreshment room, which was amply supplied with dainty viands well suited to replace the regular late dinner.

Here the familiarity of eating together produced its usual effect, and Kate grew quite at home with the fastidious *attaché*, who found her ready rejoinders and bright talk much to his taste.

Presently a quadrille band in a room next that in which they were struck up an irresistible, dreamy German waltz.

"Ah!" cried St. Ledger, "that is the perfection of dance music."

"Yes," returned Travers, quickly. "Kate! let us take advantage of this rare chance. The first waltz is mine."

Kate smiled consent.

"Why, Travers! this is indeed a rapid act!" said St. Ledger, opening his eyes. "Don't trust yourself to him, Miss Carey! He can't possibly dance!"

"Oh, I must keep my promise, Mr. St. Ledger."

"What marvellous fidelity! Then give me the next, and be equally loyal."

"Certainly, with pleasure!"

"Come, Kate," said Travers, impatiently. She took his arm, and they passed into the drawing-room.

"What a delicious waltz!" said Kate.

"Yes, it will be!" returned Travers, more to himself than to his partner. "Are you afraid to trust yourself to me, Kate, after St. Ledger's base insinuation?"

"I would trust you with anything, anywhere, Dick!"

Travers did not venture to reply, but if, when he put his arm round her to begin, he held her close, much closer than necessary, "'twas to be forgiven."

"What a delightful floor!" said Kate, when they paused. "What a delightful party! I am determined to forget there is such a thing as to-morrow, and all that to-morrow may bring. It is well to have a breathing space of pure enjoyment."

"You are right! For myself, there is neither past nor future—only this heavenly present."

His tone struck a strange shiver along her nerves. There was something in it she had never heard in his voice before, except on that night when he had called her "darling," in an unconscious way, and then she had not known that he was engaged, as

she supposed he must have been, but that was no matter—nothing in short mattered for the next two or three hours.

"Shall we go on?" asked Travers.

"Yes, but look, Mrs. Hume has just come in. She has smiled and bowed to me, so kindly. She is quite charming. Who is that stern, solemn-looking man with her? He was calling on her the day I went to luncheon."

"No doubt," returned Travers, smiling. "That is General Sir Hector Macdonald—rather a big man. They are to be married the week after next. I have known their plans for some time, but it is only just announced publicly. He has been appointed to a high command in India, and wants to take his wife with him."

"Ah——" a long-drawn ah. "That is why she looks so happy!"

"Is that the invariable effect of going to be married?"

"Oh, no! The going to be married might make one look wretched if it were not to the right man, but to know you were to be always the friend and companion of the one you love, why, that would be happiness indeed."

"Come along, Kate, and don't suggest an impossible paradise! Neither of us is to say anything that can spoil this evening."

They stopped only when the music gave out.

"Look, the moon has 'obliged' Lady Lanesborough. It is a heavenly night, soft and dry. Let

us go out to that terrace by the river—unless you wish to give St. Ledger his waltz,” said Travers.

“I don’t care. Probably he has seen and disapproved of my dancing. The next, you see, is a set of lancers, which will give us time for a stroll,” she returned. Yes, it was a heavenly night, so was the music, so was the very grass she trod on. Dick was a free man—free to be their friend and counsellor—to interest himself as heretofore, in their humble affairs, with no superior duties to call him away. No wonder the *fête* seemed to peep into Paradise.

The view from the terrace over the moonlit river was soft and fair enough to suit Kate’s mood.

“Let us sit here,” said Travers, as they reached the end of a broad walk, where a bench commanded the length of placid water which flowed past the grounds to a bend of what seemed a sheet of shimmering silver, thrown into relief by the dark mass of a wooded bank behind it.

They were silent for some seconds.

Then Kate asked, “Is Lord Balmuir here to-night?”

“No. He has gone out of town till Monday with Lord P——. Hence my liberty.”

“What did Mrs. Hume mean when she said it was not wise to refuse Sir Somebody Something’s invitation, and to throw away your chances, when we were driving down here? I noticed that you did not answer directly—that you rather pushed away the subject.”

"Oh, Mrs. Hume is rather taken with that African undertaking you have heard of. In fact, she has put money in it, and fancies I could make or discover tons of gold."

"Why won't you go, Dick? It is a sort of thing you would enjoy. Then you might come back and go into Parliament as Member for South Africa!"

"And suppose I lost the few pounds I have, returning to find Balmuir supplied with a better man than myself, and the world before me, with precious few chances to choose from? I should come and abuse you for giving me bad advice."

"So many people appear to think it would be well for you to go to Africa," said Kate, slowly.

Travers did not answer immediately. He was watching the fair cheek and chin—the finely moulded throat, on which the pale light fell. The face was only partly turned towards him, enough to show where the dark lashes on her downcast lids showed against her soft white skin. She turned towards him as if waiting for an answer.

"There are ties in London I do not care to break—no, not to break, that I hope will never happen, but I don't like the thought of dragging a lengthening chain. I prefer to feel the bands drawing tighter and closer."

"Ah! Dick, you have no family ties in London. I believe you only have fetters—the fetters of our troublesome selves. We have been too much and too long on your shoulders."

"My dear Kate! My friendship with your father

and yourselves has been the best bit of my life in London."

"Dick, listen to me," she said, her hand on his arm, and he promptly took it in both his own. She left it with him. "I know you are giving up perhaps a good opening for our sake, and you must not, sir! Do you heed, as well as hear me? You must accept this invitation. You know something of the country, and you know the world. Give yourself the trouble to find out all you can about this scheme. You are quite capable of judging its merits, and if it is reasonably promising, go, and make a career. You may get a good appointment, a dozen good things. I shall think we have ruined your prospects if you do not enquire into matters."

"If I do, what shall I find on my return?" asked Travers, slowly releasing her hand, on her movement to withdraw it.

"The friends you have helped so loyally, just the same as ever—ready to bid you 'Caede Millia Failtha!'"

"And yourself? Married to some rich fellow, who will give me the cold shoulder."

"No man who marries me will dare to do that!" said Kate, with a tremulous laugh. "It would be as much as his place was worth!" There was something infinitely touching in the struggle she made to hide the emotion she could not quite control.

Travers was silent for a moment—then he said, in a low tone, as if speaking to himself:

"It would be an awful wrench to leave you—you must know that."

"No," she returned, "I do not know. I will not know. We must think of the future, you and I. Dick, you have lost one fortune. You must make another. Besides, it is better to be a leader in a colony than a private secretary in London, however well placed. I have no ambition for myself, but quantities for those I love."

"You are very trying, my sweet cousin!" said Travers, smiling, and again taking her hand. "You should not be so suggestive!"

Kate's heart throbbed vehemently, but she replied with admirable steadiness—"I should be an ungrateful girl, and so would Alsie, if we were not fond of you, so I want you to think of yourself and your own fortunes. Think seriously of the offer made to you. It must be worth considering or Mrs. Hume would not have been so earnest about it."

"Well, to please you I will go into the matter, and if there is anything like real promise in it, I'll go! Now, take off your glove, and let me kiss hands on the possible appointment!"

Kate laughed, blushed and drew off her glove.

"Remember you are not to marry Tulloch in my absence."

"Why, do you want to dance at my wedding?" she asked, with the spice of coquetry inherent in her.

"Kate, you are too bad. Promise me——"

"No, no, no promises, Dick! True comrades like you and me need no such silken threads to bind us. I will promise this, however, to marry Jamie when he asks me!"

"I fancy he is fond of you in his way, and you flirt outrageously with him!"

"Nonsense, Dick! and let my hand go. No respectful subject ever kisses his Queen's hand more than once!"

"Not even a devoted subject who longs to be master as well?"

"We will not have either paradoxes or promises, Dick!" she returned, steadily, though a strange thrill quivered through her veins at his words and tone. "Let us try and conquer fortune each in our own way. I really think my father is tolerably sure of employment with Wincks, and so long as he has that we can make both ends meet with a little stretching."

"A mere life interest, Kate, dependent on Wincks' term of existence, and from what you say, he is very shaky. That is the reason I hate to put the wide ocean between us."

"Don't say anything more about it. Listen, they are playing 'The Blue Danube,'" a new waltz in those days. "Oh, come and dance."

"By all means!" returned Travers, rising. "If I carry out your orders, my queen, it may be our last together."

"Ah!" cried Kate, with a momentary delightful abandon, "let us enjoy it thoroughly, and fancy it will go on for ever."

CHAPTER XV.

VAIN DISQUIET.

TRAVERS had some difficulty in making up his mind after this conversation. Apart from his dread of leaving Carey to drift about the great London ocean, without a pilot, his inclination was to go to Africa. He had strong belief in the future of the Dark Continent. Moreover, he knew his chances there would be excellent. Still, his deep attachment to Kate made him hesitate. Could he believe that Carey's position in Wincks' office was safe, even for a couple of years, he would have ventured.

In this uncertainty, accident, as it sometimes seems to do, settled the question for him.

Two or three days after the garden party, Lord Balmuir asked Travers to run down to Torquay with him for a week, as he wished to see his sister, who was in delicate health, and also to get a little rest, for the session, now drawing to a close, had been a trying one.

Travers therefore wrote to decline the invitation he had received from Sir Edward Vance, the presiding genius of the expedition so often referred to, and accompanied his patron. The day following, he

met Sir Edward face to face, as he was strolling along the seafront. They joined forces and fell into rather confidential talk, remarking on the curious accident of their meeting, and the fact that it was Travers' refusal of his invitation which set Sir Edward free to visit his favourite haunt.

"It looks like fate, eh?" he said. "Why don't you listen to reason? I am going to meet C——, and one or two other men connected with our scheme at Southampton, the week after next; come along and hear all we have to say. Why should you waste your life in the stagnation of a private secretaryship. Hey? You can only scrape along. You will never have a chance of making a pile. Of course, you have opportunities for picking up an heiress, but that's a beggarly style of thing, after all. Throw in your lot with us, and you'll have first pick in a grand new country, and be governor of it, perhaps, one of these days."

Travers confessed it was a tempting scheme—and finally agreed to meet Sir Edward, as suggested by the keen old financier. Then he talked to Lord Balmuir, who confessed himself incapable of offering a sound opinion, as he was most reluctant to part with his secretary.

"You must not mind me, however," he added. "I am prejudiced; you must be guided by what you think will be best for yourself."

So Travers found himself contemplating as a possibility what ten days ago seemed out of the question.

Among the letters which awaited his return to

town was a brief note from Tulloch. "Dear Travers, —If you can spare a couple of hours from your grandee friends, come and dine with me at my diggings on Tuesday at seven-thirty. I want your help and advice. Try and come." This was dated the previous Saturday. Travers looked through a crowd of cards which were all for evening parties, and then telegraphed his acceptance.

Tulloch was located in one of the smaller streets near Westbourne Terrace, in an expensive and comfortable lodging.

He received Travers with effusion, pressing him to eat and to drink with hearty hospitality, talking rather noisily of politics and city manners, while the servant was coming in and out, but evidently weighted with some personal difficulty to be discussed in private over the "wine and walnuts."

"Why, Travers, you neither eat nor drink!" he exclaimed, when they were alone. "Try the port. It's rather a choice wine, I flatter myself."

"Thank you, I rarely touch port. Your claret is excellent. I don't often drink anything else."

"Well, I'll take my own prescription," returned Tulloch, "especially as I want something to fortify me," he added, with an uneasy laugh.

"In a scrape?" asked Travers.

"No, no. Thank God, I never was in a scrape yet; only in a little difficulty, more a matter of feeling, you know, than reality. Of course, it is my own fault. I am too impulsive. In short—a——" he paused.

"Well?" said Travers, setting down his glass.

"The fact is, I was a little overcome by my feelings, and—and the first rate style of everything at the ball—and—you'll grant it was a great temptation, for she's a deuced handsome girl and dressed—by Jove, her turnout was splendid! So I just asked her to marry me, and, rather to my surprise, she said yes!" There was exultation in Tulloch's tone as he said this, and he hastily swallowed a glass of port and began with renewed courage.

"Of course I am greatly gratified, for I could not do better, and her money will smoothe my road pretty considerably; but, you see, I am not quite comfortable about—about Kate—Kate Carey." The murder was out, and a look of relief stole over Jamie's features.

"Indeed!" returned Travers, with much gravity. "Have you been so imprudent as to give her encouragement?"

"Don't speak in that way, Travers. I have the greatest respect for my kinswoman; indeed, I was considerably taken up with her, and if she had had even a trifle of money, if even her father and sister had had anything beyond their wits to live upon, I would have followed the inclination of my heart, and married her. But it wouldn't do, Travers—it really would not do, especially since I saw the height of folly of which they were capable. When I found they were absolutely going to take that designing old Frenchwoman to live with them, and at free quarters, by George! I saw it was time to shove off. I said

to myself: This will never do; you'd only put a millstone round your neck, Jamie, my boy."

"It was certainly unwise," put in Travers.

"Ay! You see it in the same light. So I made up my mind to renounce them all; and, take my advice, you do the same thing."

"Unfortunately, you see, I have not your strength of character," returned Travers, with an air of conviction.

"Perhaps not. But few men have. Now, what troubles me, and what you can help me in, is that, without any conceit or nonsense, I am afraid that Kate has grown fond of me, and rather expected I would propose for her. Women are so unreasonable, so averse, to take a commonsense view of things."

"Ha! This is a complication," ejaculated Travers, solemnly.

"Yes, isn't it!" cried Tulloch. "But you, who have so often seen us together must have observed the favour the poor girl always showed me. Goodness knows I could have loved her well, if it hadn't been for that insane imprudence about the old Frenchwoman." Here he filled another consolatory bumper. "But it stands to reason, a girl that could act in that way is quite unfit to be the wife of a steady, hard-working, business man. All the same, I can't bear the idea of wounding her; in fact, I feel too much for other people, and you would do me the greatest favour if—if you wouldn't mind breaking the news to her. I don't think old Carey will give me any trouble. He is too heedless and harum-scarum to——"

"But, Tulloch, you ought not to make ducks and drakes of my feelings either. Fancy the trial it will be to witness her despair."

"I know, I know, and I don't like to think of it, but—— By George! Travers, I believe you are laughing. I am afraid you are rather a heartless fellow; you are a regular worlding. I cannot be so callous. Still, you might do this for me. I am sure Kate has a sisterly regard for you, and a confidence in you which would make the job easier to you than to anyone else, and you might do so much for me."

"I am not going to refuse, Tulloch, and I'll do it all the more readily because I don't think Kate will break her heart about you."

"Oh! you don't, don't you? Well, I am sure I hope she won't. I trust in heaven she doesn't care a straw about me! But——" he shook his head tragically. "Ah! if I hadn't a sense of what is due to myself—that is, conscience—I never could have acted as I have done. What eyes she has! What a velvet soft white skin!" And Tulloch went on to enumerate the charms he had had the resolution to renounce in favour of Mammon, till Travers longed to throw a decanter at his head.

"That will do," he exclaimed, somewhat savagely. "You have put your hand to the plough. There is no use in looking back. However, I am going out to Notting Hill in a day or two, and I shall break this terrible intelligence as tenderly as I can. Meantime I have one or two places to go to, and must wish you good-night."

"What! going already! Why, this is treating a fellow shabbily. When can you dine with me? I promised 'Pen' to take you up one evening and present you."

"Who is 'Pen'?"

"Miss Golding."

"No, Tulloch, not yet! That would be too much for my feelings—to see poor, dear deserted Kate's successful rival!"

"It's all deuced unpleasant," said Tulloch, seriously.

"You see the results of too strong a power of fascination."

"A fellow can never be sure if you are chaffing or not," exclaimed Tulloch.

Travers laughed, lit a fresh cigar, and departed.

The rest of the week was rather crowded with work and engagements, which included the wedding of Mrs. Hume, at which Travers and the lady's sister and brother-in-law were the only guests. It was not therefore till the following Sunday, in the afternoon, that Travers was able to present himself at Oakley Villas.

Alicia had her bonnet on, and was just about to start for her Sunday school. Kate was reading, and Mr. Carey had a Sunday paper in his hand.

"Well, Mr. Travers!" he exclaimed, good humouredly. "You are quite a stranger. What has become of you?"

Travers explained, and cordial greetings were exchanged, while he noticed that Kate looked pale and that dusky shadows below her eyes gave a fresh pen-

sive charm to her face, though her eyes lit up as he turned from her father to herself.

"It's a delightful day after the damp and drizzle of last week," exclaimed Travers, when Alicia had departed. "Suppose, Mr. Carey, we chartered a hansom—we are all three slim—and drive down to Kew Gardens. It is lovely and shady there."

"Not I. I've come to that period of life where the greatest pleasure in life is rest and peace. I'm going to read myself to sleep with this paper, please God. Kate, my heart, if you'd like to go, go, and I'll have supper all ready for you when you come back."

"Yes, do come, Kate. I have a tremendous piece of news to tell you. No, it doesn't concern you or me," seeing a look of expectancy steal into her eyes.

"Then I am sure I know your news already," she cried, clapping her hands softly together. "It is that Jamie Tulloch is going to marry Miss Golding!"

"How do you know?" asked Travers, in great surprise.

"Because the bride-elect was here yesterday, and told the whole tale with many particulars. Really, Jamie is in great luck, for Miss Golding is a nice kind-hearted girl, and if she does believe in the power of wealth, why, she will be all the more in sympathy with her future husband."

"Yes, there will be a delightful unanimity of feeling on that point. But let us be going."

"I am afraid it is rather late. We have our supper about seven, you know, and——"

"Oh! nonsense; we have three hours, and we haven't had an 'outing' for ages. Not since the moonlight garden party. Oh, that was delightful!"

The colour came slowly to Kate's face; and she looked away to the window.

"I was going to say, when you interrupted me so rudely, that I could not go out. I promised Madame La Rose to wait here, in case a French gentleman should call. She is in hopes of an engagement to teach his son English in the evening. She is only engaged for the morning hours now. She has gone to try and see him now, but he may call here; so I am on guard, you see."

This was said lightly; yet Travers' keen ear detected an undertone of embarrassment; and he thought, "She does not like to be alone with me. I must not press her."

"You should not commit yourself in this way, Kate. It is a pity to lose so fine a day, and now you will be obliged to entertain me all the afternoon—no light task, but I am not going to make room for the Frenchman."

"Faith, it's easy to forget how time goes, with a pleasant fellow like yourself," said Carey, from his arm-chair. "You sit down, and tell us poor outsiders some of the latest political gossip, and any other you like."

Kate drew a low wicker chair to the open window. The sun had gone away eastward, and the sweet soft

air came in from the grassy wilderness below. Travers opened his budget, repeating many canards and some fairly true reports; finally, after a pause, he resumed, "I fancy after all I am fated to go to Africa."

"Bless my soul, Travers, you don't say so!"

"Yes, I thought I had finished the matter when I refused Sir Edward Vance's invitation to visit him: but to my surprise, when I thought he was in Yorkshire, he was the first person I ran up against in Torquay. We had a long palaver, and I have promised to meet him and some of the directors. The expedition is in the hands of a board of directors now at Southampton." And Travers proceeded to recapitulate some of Sir Edward's arguments. Carey listened with profound interest, putting many questions.

"It promises well," he exclaimed at length. "I wish I were a young fellow; begad, I'd like nothing better than to go with you, Travers, my boy,"

"And a capital comrade you would make, sir. Your spirit and humour would keep the camp alive."

"It will be rather dangerous—the exploration part, I mean," said Kate, breaking silence for the first time.

"Not more than any hunting expedition usually is. The natives are not such fighting men as those of other parts; at least so we are assured, and I be-

lieve it, for I have hunted over some of the country; that is one reason why they want me to join them."

"Here—here's half a column, no a column and a half, faith, all about the 'Expedition to the south-eastern country bordering the Zambesi,'" cried Carey, who had been scanning the paper. "Read it to me, will you, like a good fellow; my eyes are rather dim to-day."

And Travers read aloud, rather slowly and monotonously, Kate thought. His voice dropped lower, and presently he stopped.

Carey slept sound and peacefully. Travers rose softly, and brought his chair close to where Kate sat partly sheltered by the window curtain.

Both were silent for some minutes. Then Travers said in a low tone, "You see I have taken your advice."

"Is it not accident rather than any advice that has actuated you, Dick?"

He thought her voice was not quite steady, and admonished himself "not to be a fool."

"Accident had a good deal to do with it certainly, but had not your words still sounded in my ears, backing up accident, I might have again refused Sir Edward, and that would have been final."

"I am so glad you did not refuse. You will be glad, too, some day, I am sure."

"I am anything but glad to-day. I—I am awfully

down at the prospect of leaving you—you all, I mean. I have grown accustomed to look to you for the only bit of home life I have ever known."

"It is a very poor little bit," said Kate, gently.

"A very sweet little bit, only not half enough to satisfy my appetite for its sweetness. You'll miss me? I am conceited enough to believe that, and will not even have Jamie Tulloch to supply my place!"

Kate laughed low and soft. "No, but we intend to be great friends with Mrs. Jamie, if she will only curb her patronising propensities a little. Miss you, Dick! I should think we shall. But you must write to us, and tell us your adventures. Your letters will be most exciting. It is very wise of you to make up your mind and go. I am quite pleased with you."

"I am not gone yet," he returned, moodily. "I must know a little more before I leave a small certainty for a big uncertainty."

"But would not Lord Balmuir promise to take you back if——"

"If I do not make a real success of this business, Kate, I will never return."

"Never return, Dick!" she exclaimed. "That is a rash resolution."

"Nevertheless it is mine. If I join Garston, I shall adopt Africa either as somebody or nobody!"

"Do you mean to say we are never to see you again?"

"Not exactly. If I make money, if I gain a good position, I shall revisit London now and then. If not, well, I shall go under, and you still advise me to risk it!"

There was a slight pause, then Kate said very quietly and firmly, "I do. You ought to be something more than a private secretary. If you were quite independent in money matters, it would be different. You might go into Parliament, and be, oh! anything. As it is, why it is high time to begin to make a fortune or a reputation."

"And if I return, I shall find you the wife of some citizen of credit and renown. What a worldly-wise little woman you have grown!"

"I must be worldly-wise. So depend upon it, Dick, only a citizen of 'credit' shall have the honour of an alliance with this broken-down family. Do not trouble about us. I fancy we shall float, and if you care to hear I shall keep you informed of our upward and onward progress. Believe me——"

Travers listened eagerly for what was to follow, but at that interesting moment Madame La Rose walked in, and Mr. Carey roused up.

Madame looked bright and elated. She had been fortunate. She had met "Monsieur" just as he was leaving his house, but such a pretty house, on Campden Hill. They had had a long conference, and finally agreed for a lesson every evening at seven—not a very convenient hour. But what would you! people earnestly seeking could not choose, etc., etc., etc.

Mr. Carey, thoroughly roused up, listened to these details with much interest, and Travers, though politely attentive, devoutly wished the speaker at the bottom of any sea, Red or Black, before she came in to arrest Kate's words.

It was no use staying on when he hadn't a chance of speaking alone with his cousin; so after describing Mrs. Hume's wedding and talking a little on various subjects he took leave, pleading an engagement of some importance as his excuse for not staying to supper.

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Travers thought much and deeply of this interview as he sped seawards to keep his engagement with Sir Edward Vance.

He was half-ashamed to think that a mere girl, fifteen or sixteen years his junior, had more prudence and self-control than himself. She was right, of course, still it wounded his "*amour propre*." He sometimes thought that she returned his affection, but if she did she would never have concealed it so well. After all, he had no right to fancy the existence of any reciprocity on her side. He was rather too old for her, and what was there about him to attract the fancy of a bright young creature. It was better, so he told himself. God forbid that he should cause any pain or anxiety to her true heart. For true, he would always believe her to be, even if she made a mercenary marriage. That would only be for the sake of her people. She had a remarkable

amount of courage and spirit. She puzzled him—he did not always understand her. She was curiously mature in spite of her fresh youthfulness, and in spite of their disparity of age he had a profound respect for her natural sense and mother wit. Then her image came vividly before him. How charming her irregular beauty, that sweet soft mouth—which could smile scornfully as well as tenderly—the large speaking eyes—the long lashes which so often hid them from him when he most wanted to read their expression. Yes, it was wiser for him to go away and leave her quite free to follow her destiny—she wished him to go—really wished it. Perhaps she divined the true state of the case—and wanted to save him as well as herself possible suffering. Well, so be it. Carey was surely safe for a couple of years at any rate, and by that time, if he was going to succeed, he would have succeeded or see success at hand. By that time Kate would probably be married, in which case he would never return to England, but do the best he could with his life in the new country he was about to try. Ah! in spite of this wise resolution, how his heart, his senses ached for Kate, with all the intensity of a man's first love, coming at the period of his fullest strength and development.

Travers found on careful examination that the new company which had finally organised the expedition he had been asked to join seemed sound and solvent. They were also more favoured by Government than their numerous successors of the present

day, being the first of the kind comparatively common. He, therefore, agreed to accept the appointment offered to him, much to Sir Edward Vance's gratification. The old gentleman carried him off to his place in Yorkshire, from whence he wrote to announce his decision to Mr. Carey.

The answer was full of kindly concern at the prospect of losing him, but foretold great things for his future. Both the girls added words of warm good wishes. This did not satisfy Travers.

Kate might have written a whole letter herself. When he had reached Glendarroch, Lord Balmuir's place, he would write what would compel a reply.

The departure of the party was fixed for the first week of September, and Travers had promised Lord Balmuir as long a visit as he could manage before returning to town to get his outfit. It was better to keep away. Besides he could be of real use to his good friend and patron by inaugurating the gentleman he had chosen to replace his late secretary.

His letter to Kate, very carefully composed, remained unanswered, to his surprise, and even his indignation, for more than a fortnight. Meantime, Tulloch, whom he had forgotten, wrote reproachfully. Travers ought to have remembered that he (Tulloch) could not, with any sense of safety or comfort, present himself at Oakley Villas till he knew how the family had taken the news of his engagement to Miss Golding.

Travers hastened to set his mind at rest, and then started with Lord Balmuir to visit a Highland

magnate, and stay for a few days' shooting, as the 12th was now close at hand.

Still there was no letter from Kate, and Travers felt as if he had already bid her good-bye for ever.

There was a pleasant party assembled at Dalgarnoch Castle, and Travers was a favoured guest. His approaching departure was a source of interest to everyone, and the days went swiftly by to all save himself. He was consumed by longings for a sight of Kate Carey's fair face; to see what her eyes would say to him in the moment of parting, and it was with a sigh of relief he bade good-bye to his host, and accompanied Lord Balmuir to Glendarroch, on his way south.

Many letters awaited both. Some of them which had not been forwarded through some mistake were of rather ancient date. While Lord Balmuir was rowing the butler in no measured terms for this oversight, Travers retreated with his correspondence to his own room. He noticed two addressed in Carey's hand, and felt, or feared, that something must be wrong.

Examining the post-marks, he opened the earliest. It was nearly a fortnight old, and very brief.

"DEAR TRAVERS,—We have had a dreadful shock. You will be grieved to hear that poor Mr. Wincks is no more. He was found lying on the stairs the day before yesterday by the servants, about half-past six a.m. Life was quite extinct. It is supposed he had come down to fetch a book in the night, for the

first volume of Mayne's work on 'Village Communities' and his candlestick lay a few steps below, and the candle at the foot of the stairs. He was in his dressing-gown and slippers. His health was weak, and his heart all wrong. There will be a coroner's inquest, of course. My precious Kate is in the greatest grief; I fear it's a bad business for me. When do you come back to town?

"Yours ever,

"ROBERT CAREY."

"What must they think of my leaving such a letter unanswered," exclaimed Travers aloud, in his keen distress, as he tore open the second. It bore the date of five days back, and was still shorter.

"DEAR TRAVERS,—Our poor friend was buried yesterday. This morning Bouchier sent for me. He came up to town immediately, and informed me that after the 25th he had no longer any need of my services. This is indeed a blow. Greatly puzzled at not hearing from you,

"Yours in great trouble,

"ROBERT CAREY."

"And I have just committed myself to this infernal expedition!" ejaculated Travers, thrusting the letters into his pocket and hurrying downstairs to seek his host, who was in the library.

"I must leave you immediately and try to catch

the London train at Edinburgh to-night," cried Travers, excitedly.

"But you can't, my dear fellow. It's impossible. Take the first to-morrow to Glasgow. You'll be in time at seven p.m. No bad news, I hope?"

"Well, yes, rather. Let me see Bradshaw."

CHAPTER XVI.

DAYBREAK.

AFTER a sleepless night Travers started early on his journey. Glendarroch was not on any of the leading lines which converge in London, and was rather difficult to approach or to escape from—a journey to or from Edinburgh or Glasgow was inevitable, whatever your destination.

Lord Balmuir parted from his ex-secretary with sincere regret, and assured him that he would back him in the future with all the Parliamentary interest he could command.

Travers, however, was far too absorbed in his own troubles and the renewal of his indecision to have much thought left for anything else; still he was momentarily gratified by this mark of regard, and with a hearty hand pressure the two men parted.

How interminable the journey appeared. At the date of this true tale the distance between London and Edinburgh was effectively greater than at present, and when at last Travers reached his lodgings it was too late to visit Carey and his daughters.

“Mr. Carey called this afternoon, sir,” said Travers’ ex-valet and present landlord, when he had admitted his tenant, whose arrival took him by surprise. “He

was here the day before yesterday also, and rather troubled at not hearing from you. He wanted your address, sir, so I said I only knew Glendarroch. Then Mr. Carey remarked he had written to you there till he was tired, and could get no answer. I made bold to ask for the young ladies, sir, and he said they were as well as they could be."

"How did he seem himself?" asked Travers, who was longing to know all about his charge, as he considered the family.

"Well, sir, I never saw him look better."

"How unobservant these kind of people are," thought Travers. "I shall find Carey woefully down on his luck, poor fellow. This has been an awful blow to him."

Before touching the dinner, or rather supper, hastily provided for him, Travers wrote a brief note to Carey explaining his silence, and saying he would call early on the following morning. This despatched to the post, he tried to eat and then to sleep, with small success.

It was impossible that he could put half the Southern Hemisphere between these helpless ones and himself, now in their time of trouble! Yet he was pledged to the party he had promised to join, and even if he could honourably break with them, he would be adrift himself. He could not expect Lord Balmuir to send away the secretary he had just engaged merely to suit his own convenience.

Amid these troubled reflections a note of joy would make itself heard as the idea flashed through

the gloom of his thoughts, like lightning across a bank of dark clouds: "Whatever happens I shall see Kate to-morrow."

The morrow came with wild gusts of wind and driving showers. It was an angry depressing day, and Travers thought the weather fitted the fortunes of his kinsfolk.

At last it was time to start. "There is little or no chance of finding Kate alone," he mused, as he looked out for a hansom. "Poor Carey does not leave early for the office nowadays! Even if I did, the determined darling would have her batteries prepared to keep me at bay. But I must speak. We must come to an understanding if I am to help them effectually: and they will want help."

He was interrupted by a voice he knew exclaiming, "Why, Travers, I was just coming to your place," and he turned, to find himself face to face with Tulloch.

"What! have you become so indolent in this London Capua, that you are not in the city at this hour?"

"Well, you see there is not much doing now, and I have rather important business in Westbourne Terrace every morning, nowadays. I am hurrying on the marriage as fast as I can. I want the honey-mooning done with before October, so that I can settle regularly to business by winter," said Tulloch, with a grin. "Glad you're back in town, Travers; poor old Carey has been wearying to see you. The death of Wincks has been a bad business for him. He came round to me with the news at once, and you never saw a fellow so broken down. I went to see them a day

or two after and found him cheered up a bit. He had got a scheme for starting a great Irish Law Agency in London, and wanted me to advance the funds. I soon quashed that. The daughters have twice his sense. I must say Kate is a first-rate girl, but, between you and me, I don't think she has much heart. She didn't seem to mind my engagement in the least, and I don't think her indifference was put on."

"Ah! It would have been more flattering if she had a heart, and broke it for you, eh?"

"What a cynical chap you are, Travers! God knows I wouldn't like to give her a moment's pain. I suppose you are going to see them?"

"Yes, I am on my way now, and a little behind time."

"All right, I take the hint. If you are going to get up any scheme for old Carey, I'll be glad to help, within certain limits, and so will Miss Golding. She is awfully taken with the whole lot of them—a trifle too much so to my mind. Good-bye for the present. Oh, by the way, is it true you are going out to Africa?"

"I am not quite sure."

"If you are behind the scenes I wish you'd give me a straight tip as to the advisability of putting a thousand or two in it!"

"I'll explain matters when we meet again," said Travers, hastily. "Hi, hansom," and the next moment he was rolling rapidly towards Notting Hill.

Contrary to his expectation, Kate was alone.

How delightfully familiar the homely room—its few ornaments—the writing-table crowded with books and papers—seemed to him, after his comparatively long absence. Kate herself looked pale and thoughtful, and seemed busy with letters or papers of some kind. How well her simple black frock became her, and how softly, beautifully white her throat looked against the black net frill which surrounded it.

“Ah! Cousin Dick!” she cried, coming forward with both hands outstretched, her eyes beaming “welcome,” and a little tremulous smile quivering on her lips.

Travers caught her hands, kissed them, and pressed them to his heart. He cast prudence to the winds, determined to risk everything.

“What—what can you have thought of my silence?” he exclaimed.

“Oh, nothing—except that I felt quite sure you never had had papa’s letter. I should much sooner doubt myself than you, Dick.” The way in which she uttered his name was infinitely caressing.

“And your father! How is he? Is he at home?”

“He is better—and brighter. He has gone round to poor Miss Wincks. Oh! I am so sorry for her, Dick! She is so utterly alone.” She had withdrawn her hands and returned to her seat at the writing-table; Travers stood leaning on the top of a high-backed chair, gladdening his eyes with contemplation of the face and form he loved so well. “I am glad she is friendly,” he resumed. “I know you thought she did not quite like her brother’s liking for you.”

"Ah! that is all past and gone now," said Kate, her eyes growing moist. "I feel as if she was left to my care."

"Ah, Kate, you have too much upon your shoulders already. Listen, my darling. Let me share your burdens. I will not, I cannot leave you. Let me have the right to help you. I can do so much more for a wife and her kin than for mere relatives."

"Ah, Dick," cried Kate, rising hastily and moving to the window, "you must not be reckless. You know it is madness to think of marrying me. Just reflect——"

"It is madness and despair not to think of it, sweetheart," said Travers, following her. "You must know how you have entered into my soul and dwell there. I will not ask you to be reckless. Let us wait a while and see our way, by all means, but let us stand before the world as affianced lovers. Give me the right to manage your affairs, to act a son's part to your good old father, unless, indeed, Kate, it would be too great a sacrifice to make." He drew close and tried to take her hand. She resisted for an instant, and then suddenly, to his surprise and delight, threw herself into his arms.

"Sacrifice," she repeated, with a sob, "it is no sacrifice, Dick, for I love you. I do love you. You have been so true, so kind; I never could care for anyone but you," and she gave her soft mouth to his kisses.

"Then you will let me stay with you?" said

Travers, after an inarticulate moment or two of rapture.

"You may do whatever you like," she murmured, still clinging to him, "for our struggles and difficulties are over. I believe I am going to be rich enough even to please Jamie Tulloch, who is by no means a bad fellow. Oh, Dick, I am frightened at the great joy God has given us. Poor Mr. Wincks has left me his residuary legatee, and Mr. Bouchier says I shall be quite well off. Just think of it, Dick. No more trouble for the dear father. He can be quite happy. It takes so little to make him happy, and Alsie can help her poor and her Sunday schools, and I can venture to show you my heart, Dick, and not feel a burden. What a benefactor my good old friend has been; and his sister has plenty of money, too. It seems nobody had an idea how rich Mr. Wincks was. I wish he had known how to enjoy his life better, and to do himself justice. No one seemed to have found out he had a heart except me."

"You take my breath away," cried Travers. "When did you hear this wonderful news?"

"The day before yesterday, Mr. Bouchier sent for papa, who went off in very good spirits, thinking he was to be taken on again. He came back all the way in a cab, which struck me as curious. I went to open the door when he rang (I know his ring), and found the cabman thanking him on the doorstep. I saw in a moment, by his face, that something wonderful and good had happened, and then

—but there, I cannot describe any more—I feel quite overpowered.”

A long, delightful, rambling talk ensued, which was interrupted by the entrance of Carey, quickly followed by Alsie and Madame La Rose, both of whom had been despatched on sundry errands.

The abounding joy of Carey may be conceived! How he shook Travers' hand, and slapped him on the shoulder, avowing that he was deeply in his debt, but swearing he'd clear off everything—“everything, my boy, but the height of obligation, and, faith, I'm willing to lie under that all the days of my life!”

“No, my dear sir, you are going, I hope, to oblige me to a degree that will far outweigh any small service it may have been in my power to render you. I am going to ask you for one of your jewels—to be my crown jewel—to beautify and bless my life from henceforth.”

“Begad, I am ready to give you the best I have!” returned Carey, with a puzzled look, “but——” He paused.

“You'd never guess!” said Kate, slipping her hand through his arm, “but he means me, and you won't refuse?”

“God bless my soul, why, I never thought of this. Never! Sure——” He paused.

“I confess I did,” said Alsie, who had greeted Travers with quiet cordiality.

“And I was quite persuaded of the devotion of M. Travers,” added Madame La Rose. “Ah! we

shall hear no more of Africa, and its life-destroying climate."

"I am not so sure," said Travers. "I fear I am in honour bound."

"Unless you can find a substitute," said Kate. "Surely among all the hunting adventurers you know some one can be found to fill your place, unless you are conceited enough to consider yourself unequalled. If you are determined to go, you must take me."

"Go, no, by all that's impossible!" cried Carey. "You must find a substitute."

And Travers, again shaking hands with his future father-in-law, said emphatically, "I'll try, for I am no longer my own master."

THE END.

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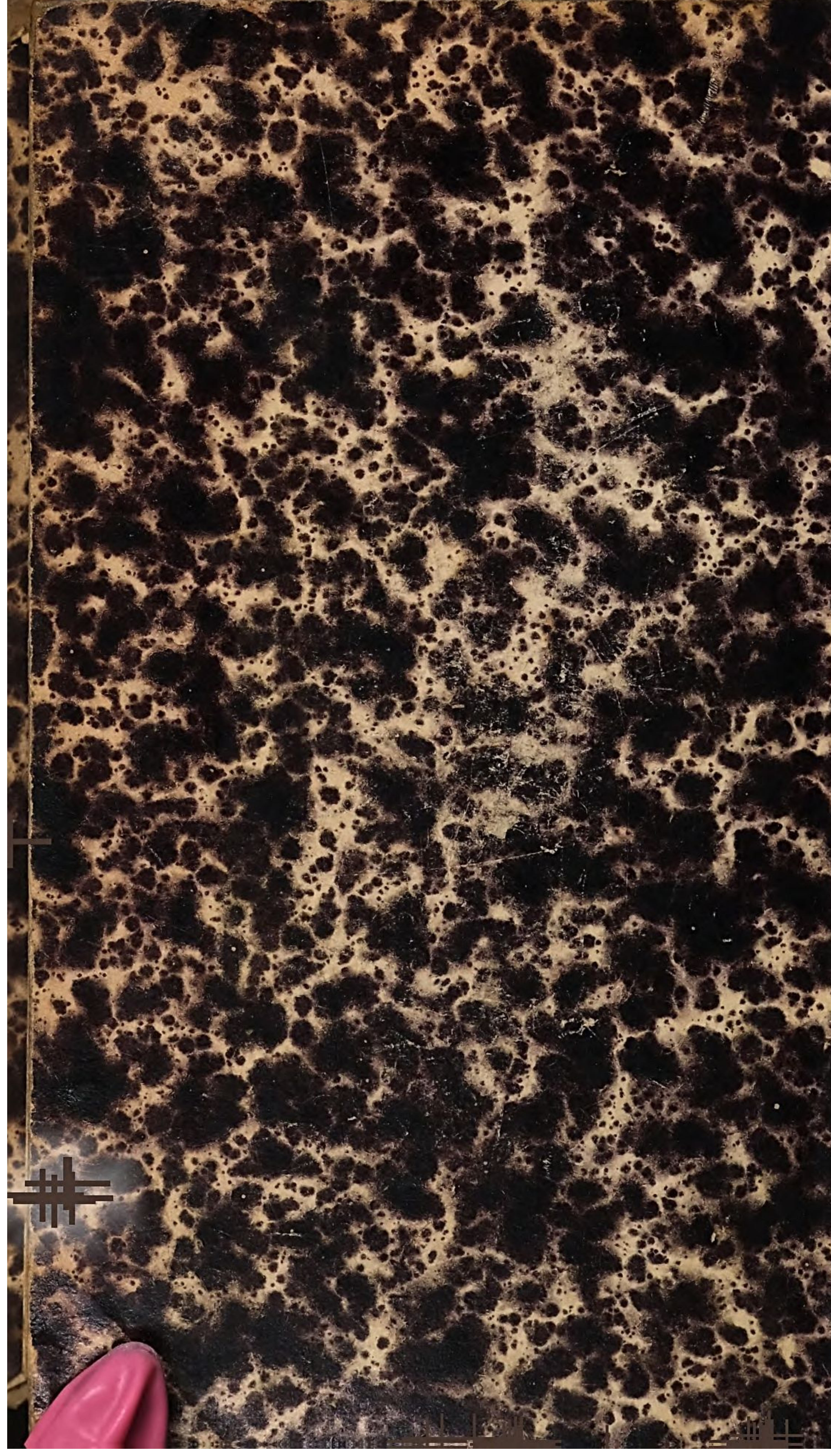
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